THE CREATION OF "ESTHER"

IMPLICATIONS OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY FOR HOLY THEATRE AND COLLECTIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY HERMENEUTICS

by

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submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

This project describes the development of a collective interdisciplinary hermeneutic of the book, Esther, which was expressed in Holy Theatre and evaluated according to guidelines drawn from a study of Old Testament Prophecy.

The first section examines Old Testament prophecy and develops criteria for puppetry and drama based on this study. The interrelationship is explored among the traditions the prophets used, the prophets' historical contexts, and their interpretations. The section considers both the content and the forms used by prophets, and looks at the risks and problems which they faced in delivering prophetic messages.

The second section narrates the story of how a group of persons at the School of Theology at Claremont, California created the Holy Theatre piece, "Esther," with masks, puppets and music, through collective interdisciplinary hermeneutics. The section describes the process from the beginning idea and selection of the tradition, Esther, to the final production of the Biblical interpretation, "Esther." The collective Biblical study and interpretation is described, using quotes from the group's interaction to illustrate the process. The section highlights the ways various disciplines, such as political discussion, script development, improvisation, and visual interpretation were used to create the Biblical interpretation. It considers artistic forms used--Holy Theatre, puppets, masks, and ritual modes--and describes how they functioned to express the message. Photographs illustrate this

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section.

In addition to the description of the process creating "Esther," the manuscript of the play, complete with stage and technical directions, is included. A cassette tape of one of the performances accompanies the project.

The project gives reflections about the strengths and weaknesses in creating the interpretation--"Esther." The corporate approach, the interdisciplinary hermeneutics and the prophetic nature of "Esther" are evaluated. Reflections are given on the excitement and creativity which emerged, and the community building which resulted as persons in the group created together. The project considers the significance of this type of Biblical interpretation for the local church.

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This is holy theatre.
We have studied the text to let it speak to our own fundamental ideas about the nature of human existence.
It looks at the realities of brutality and violence to show us our own sin, but gives us the grace of humor that we may tolerate the pain.
And this is holy.
Our message is part of our vision of human destiny.
It cries no, No, NO! to that brutality and injustice.
And this is holy.
Not only does it make what is invisible in the abstract visible, it makes the invisible creative urge in each one of us and the creative interaction among us visible.
And this is holy.
It allows us to come together as equals--children and adults, professors and students--each feeling vulnerable about our lack of experience--yet risking, sharing and creating together.
And this is holy.
Our play is a sharing of love.
And this is holy.

--Theresa Mason, 1978

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient Biblical prophets proclaimed the truth about the nature of reality in their situation. Their proclamations provided a mirror to themselves and to their society through sign, symbol and word--to expose their own sin and the brutality and injustice which surrounded them. Likewise, puppet theatre and dramatic presentations can be mirrors to ourselves and to our own contemporary context to show us the truth about reality. This project applies the hermeneutical approach used by the Old Testament prophets to the creation and production of theatre and narrates the story of how a group of people created collective hermeneutic which they expressed through a holy theatre presentation. We interpreted the book of Esther through an interdisciplinary approach which combined Biblical study, analysis of contemporary social and political situations, discussion of how the Biblical text applied to our contemporary setting, and exploration of its meaning through art forms. The text informed our interpretation which we in turn expressed through a communally created experimental theatre piece with masks, music, drama and puppets. Persons of all ages and different backgrounds came together to participate in a common experience which helped develop community. I reflect upon the corporate hermeneutic which sought to apply the principles derived from studying the prophetic messages and upon the possibilities for developing this type of experience in a local church.

The description of the process of creating the holy theatre piece, "Esther" and the script which follows, is not a recipe for a

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group to follow or a model which I am holding up to people to copy without adaptation. As you read the narration, you will see that it describes a particular community from the School of Theology, with the particular make-up (abilities, ideas, values, etc.) each individual within the group brought to the total creation. Other groups who choose to evolve collective hermeneutics and corporate creations will find their own style, their own patterns for study, their own choices of traditions and disciplines to integrate into their particular situation. Instead of a recipe, it is our story which I wish to share with you. As the poem in the beginning expresses, the theatrical presentation of "Esther" shared the meaning and excitement of the previous process with the wider community.

Furthermore, I want to share this study of the prophets and the story of the creation of the holy theatre piece, "Esther," with you, because both have been deeply meaningful to me. Both challenged me to face the truth about the world with all of its injustices and brutality and to take the risk of sharing my outrage.[1] Both the study of the prophets and the creation of the experimental theatre piece provoked me to look at the contrast between who I am and who I am called to be; they made me struggle with what it means to be the people of God and how we are called to act that out in the world. And both moved me to see God's

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[1]I think that rather than letting the brutalities and injustices of the world make us hide from reality or render us powerless, we in the church should create interdisciplinary studies to face them more openly. If we studied the issues of our world with other people in the church, informed our study with our faith, developed means to express our reactions through proclamation and action, we might become more vulnerable and honest with life, for we could have a means to channel the pain through us, a community to challenge and support us, and an opportunity to take action.

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power and grace moving in and through the common ordinary events of life and to catch a glimpse of the vision of God's purpose for the earth.

I believe that these points that provoked me are central issues which can move us to struggle toward what it means to be the church. In addition to these values, I believe this project has additional relevance for the local church. The study of the nature of truth proclaimed by the ancient prophets not only provides us some insight into their message and the implications for today, but it also informs the creation of our own contemporary messages. It develops guidelines which are applied to puppet theatre and drama. These guidelines could also be adapted to preaching, visual presentations or any expression which seeks to communicate the truth. The study also looks at the risk and challenges of the prophetic message and the reasons why the message is proclaimed, nevertheless.

The process a group of us developed to interpret and create the experimental theatre piece, "Esther," is one example of collective hermeneutics that attempts to be prophetic. Although this is not a model to be followed without adaptation, I think some specific points can be applied to other settings. First of all, it shows one attempt to develop theatre upon criteria established by the inter-relationship of tradition, context and interpretation (as explained in Chapter 1). Secondly, it is one example of collective hermeneutics. Only a few books are available to persons in the church that discuss a method for developing Biblical hermeneutics in a group process. This project presents an alternative to the current predominant method by which a single scholar, preacher, or student studies the text and then tells the community what it means and how they are to interpret it. I believe the

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church community could greatly profit by further exploring the potential of group study, interpretation and expression of the Bible and other texts. In the third place, rather than segmenting the various disciplines, as most churches do, we designed our process to enact a wholistic approach which combined and integrated various disciplines (such as Bible study, theologizing, artistic expression, study of social concerns, etc.). In the fourth place, persons of different ages, backgrounds, education and ability came together to share their particular talents and contributions. This intergenerational and interdisciplinary approach leads to the formation of community among persons who may not have related to one another under other circumstances. Ideally, in a purified form, this could become an analogy for what it means to be the body of Christ: calling forth the gifts and abilities of each individual, affirming their source of power through the Spirit, and affirming the complementary relationship of all the parts in their oneness in the whole body. And finally, this project also shows some of the problems and possibilities in creating this style of theatre. As I describe the process, I reflect upon some possibilities this style of theatre offers, that may be of interest to people in the church, such as using masks, puppets, improvisation, and holy theatre.

The first chapter of the project studies the nature of the communication of the Old Testament prophets. It examines the content and form of these prophetic proclamations and looks at the risks and problems they faced in delivering these messages.

The second chapter looks at the implications of the study in Chapter 1 which are relevant for us today and seeks to develop criteria from this study that can be used as a basis for developing a

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hermeneutical approach with puppet theatre and dramatic presentations.

In subsequent chapters, I narrate the process used in creating collective hermeneutics employing criteria designated in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 through 6 trace the story of the process in which people came together to create the holy theatre presentation, "Esther," from the emergence of the idea through to the final happening. I describe and reflect upon the various aspects of the total process as they occur in the story.

Just as the process included various modes of expression (visual, musical, verbal, etc.) this project also integrates verbal expression, visual interpretation, music, and sound. In addition to the written description of the process, I have included the written script with technical directions, pictures of the process of creation and of the play itself, as well as a tape of the final presentation complete with dialogue, music and sound effects.

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PART I

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Chapter 1

THE PROPHETIC COMMUNICATION OF TRUTH

Introduction

Old Testament prophets from the Classical period between 750 and 540 B.C.[1] communicated the truth as they understood it to be. Whether or not the prophecy happened as they proclaimed was not the criterion for truth. The fact that a message condemned or threatened woe did not make it truth. Likewise, if it functioned to proclaim hope or to promise grace, that did not make it true. It did not depend on the particular form of relevation. Even if their message called for undivided allegiance to God, we can not assuredly say that it was true prophecy.[2] Rather, in this project the criteria for true prophecy will be based upon what has been described by James Sanders as a "hermeneutical triangle."[3] According to Sanders, true prophecy was a dynamic interplay between the text or tradition used, the particular situation in which the prophet finds himself or herself (also called the context),

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[1]James Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 63.

[2]J. L. Crenshaw, Prophetic Conflict (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), p. 49.

[3]James Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy," in George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (eds.) Canon and Authority (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 21-41.

It is not in the scope of this paper to discuss the historical background on the interpretation of true prophecy. The reader may find information of the development of this study in Coats and Long.

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and the application of text and context through appropriate hermeneutics. He describes this interdependence and interrelationship between the tradition, the historical milieu of the prophet, and the interpretation as a hermeneutical triangle. The foundation for this project study of the nature of true prophecy is based upon this dynamic interrelationship among text, context, and interpretation.

The study of true prophecy begins with an exploration of the three elements within the hermeneutical triangle. The second part of this chapter discusses the discernment of truth from falsehood, the seduction of false prophecy and the reasons why it was so difficult for the prophets to speak the truth. Their source of courage and power is revealed. The chapter ends with a section describing the forms which they used to communicate prophetic messages.

The Nature of True Prophecy in Relation to the Hermeneutical Triangle

To explore the relation of true prophecy to the hermeneutical triangle, I begin by examining the prophets' relation to tradition. Like other Old Testament figures, the classical prophets have their roots in tradition. Most of them (Amos, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah and Ezekiel) based their message on the Mosaic Torah story. Isaiah's message was based on the authority of the Davidic Jerusalem story.[4] Second Isaiah based his prophecy upon both the Mosaic and the Davidic story. They did not relegate these traditions to the past however, but they used them to bear witness according to their own context within the

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[4]Ibid., p. 56.

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changing dynamics of history.[5] They used these texts to speak the truth and to expose the secrets of the community's hearts through their prophetic critique. What separates these prophets from the false prophets is not the tradition they called to memory, but the way they reinterpreted it according to their current situation.

The prophet's current situation, or the context, is the second part of the triangle. This context refers to the whole historical, cultural, social, political, economic, national, and international situation to which the prophets applied the texts and to the particular people to whom the message was addressed. The prophets were critical observers of the national, social, religious, and moral state of their people. For example, Amos was very concerned about the political situation in his historical context. He regarded the settlement of the Hebrew tribes in Canaan and the acquisition of land and trade as an apostacy[6] that made more distinctions between the rich and poor and escalated other injustices. In the prophetic literature of Amos, he attacks the breaches of international law committed by other nations. This makes up the first part of Amos. In the second part, he condemns the more serious breaches of law committed by Israel.[7] Hosea was also deeply concerned about the social situation. He participated in the political revolutions in the court of Samaria. He thought that the root of the problems in state affairs arose from the fact that no one had

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[5]Brevard S. Childs, Memory and Tradition in Israel, (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1962), p. 88.

[6]Amos 2:6. (All scripture is from Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.)

[7]Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1965), II, 135.

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fidelity to God. He proclaimed that this disobedience would lead to darkness and judgement. Micah also argued against the leaders of the people and became more pessimistic about the nature of all the people.[8] Jeremiah, too, was concerned with the historical framework of his age. His call was closely connected to the events in the world political scene. One need only read briefly from each of these prophets' oracles to see the centrality of the historical situation in their messages. Not only were they concerned about the political-cultural situation, but they also discerned their particular context in order to give the proper message for the moment with the proper hermeneutic.

The third point of the triangle is the hermeneutics of the classical prophets. They did not use the texts as a proof text to apply their own point to their context. Instead, they interpreted the original meaning of a tradition according to the historical situation by molding and remolding the views of a passage. For example, Isaiah takes the idea of the foundation of Jerusalem, which had been interpreted by popular theology to mean that Jersusalem would not be damaged, and changed the interpretation to say that God has the freedom to tear down and rebuild the city. If the people have faith, then, even though this cornerstone would be destroyed, God would still be their God and transform them into a new Israel.[9] Prophets used tradition to speak the truth and expose the secrets of the community. Jeremiah took the Deuteronomic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant which people had used to claim that the temple would not be destroyed and changed them to show

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[8]Johannes Linblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962).

[9]Isaiah 38:16.

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the people they had broken their particular side of the covenant. He spelled out what requirements they had to fulfill for their side of the covenant.[10] Ezekiel used the Old Torah story as a basis for his messages of judgement.[11] In fact, the old story which the people had used to preach security was adapted and reinterpreted by the classical prophets as the basis for their judgement oracles.[12]

In summary, the three aspects of the hermeneutical triangle show that the prophets witnessed to Israel's historic faith remembering and interpreting the tradition according to the events they saw in reality. As Childs says, they have taken up the old forms and "twisted them into words of judgement and hurled them back into the faces of those who persisted in nurturing the sacred tradition of the past."[13] They witnessed reality through the guidance of Yahweh, like it really was, not like they hoped it would be, and they revealed the truth about this and their corporate destiny. They identified themselves with the people as they gave their message. Thus, their prophetic critique became a mirror for both their own identity and a mirror to society.

The Seduction of False Prophecy

Many times, there is a narrow distinction between false and true prophecy. False prophecy has many of the same characteristics of true prophecy. The prophets who preached false prophecy often used the same

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[10]Jeremiah 7:4-7. [11]Ezekiel, Chapters 16 and 23.

[12]See for instance Hosea 2:16-17, Isaiah 1:21-27, 32:1-18, 33:1-22, Jeremiah 16:14-16, 23:7-8, 31:31-34. From James Sanders, "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon," in Magnalia Dei (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), p. 16.

[13]Childs, p. 39.

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texts as the true classical prophets used. For example, both Jeremiah and Hananiah illustrated their opposing views with the same text.[14] Like true prophets they used the same formulas; they had visions and revelations; they performed symbolic actions and used the same forms of speech; but their inspiration was not from Yahweh, according to Jeremiah, but from the cult and the worship of Baal.[15] Many have said that a popular theology[16] was evoked by false prophets. Generally they did preach a message of grace, but preaching grace is not necessarily false. I agree with Crenshaw, that one can not detect false prophecy simply because the message proclaims well being.[17] The fact is, the context of their historical situation was one in which persons had gone astray and were in need of challenge if they were to repent and be restored. In this context, false prophets led people astray with empty fantasies and deceptive inventions of false security and idolatry. Ezekiel compared them to someone daubing a flimsy wall with whitewash in order to make it strong.[18] He said they disguised the defects of the nation with this preaching in order to lead people to believe that all was well.[19] They preached "shalom," or grace, to the wicked, which sugarcoated the moral and political life of a nation with a false

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[14]Jeremiah 28.

[15]Jeremiah 28; 31; 23:13. Jeremiah also said that they were not called or sent by Yahweh.

[16]Vox populi (Crenshaw) Zionist theology or establishment theology are the terms often used to refer to it.

[17]Crenshaw, p. 15.

[18]Ezekiel 13:10.

[19]Ezekiel 13:10-16.

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security.[20] Isaiah likened their sugary message to being drunk with the wine of false grace.[21] He said the people said "speak to us of smooth things"[22] and the false prophets obliged in order to please people. According to Isaiah, when the people needed to hear challenge, the prophets spoke baby talk; they could not put together letters to get a word, much less a sentence.[23] Micah condemned them for preaching cheap grace of Zionist theology.[24] He said that when false prophets' mouths were fed, they preached peace, but when they were hungry, they preached war. The false prophets, in turn, told Jeremiah, Isaiah and Micah not to preach all the gloom.[25]

The false prophets were not only the ones in danger of speaking falsehood. The prophetic texts show that on occasion the true prophets were not sure whether they were telling the word of Yahweh or speaking from their own subconscious.[26] Discerning the truth and conveying it was extremely difficult. As Ms. Osswald states, "the true prophet must be able to distinguish whether an historical hour stands under the wrath or love of God."[27] Isaiah was one who thought he was preaching the

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[20]Linblom, p. 214.

[21]Isaiah 28.7.

[22]Isaiah 30.10.

[23]Isaiah 23.13.

[24]Micah 2:12-13; 4:11-13.

[25]Micah 2:6, Isaiah 30:10; Jeremiah 28:11.

[26]Jeremiah 32:6-8. From Crenshaw, p. 122.

[27]Osswald, Falsche Prophetic im Altem Testament (1962) from Crenshaw, p. 22.

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truth when he was actually blind to the truth.[28] Following his first call[29] he used his Davidic theology to preach a cheap grace that prevented people from repenting. This man, whom we now label a classical, true prophet, delivered the right message at the wrong time. However, he was given his second understanding of Davidic Theology in his second call.[30] Henceforth, he proclaimed that God was a God of both judgement and salvation, dread and sanctuary.[31]

Persons like Isaiah learned to speak the truth, but persons who spoke the truth also easily succumbed to falsehood. We see examples of this in the prophetic legends of I Kings 13 and the story of Elisha, who fled from Jezebel.[32] Even Jeremiah ran away from proclaiming the message after encountering the more peaceful words of Hananiah. However, he did not give in to the smooth words but returned to face Hananiah and his lie.[33]

Crenshaw lists five main reasons why persons succumb to speaking falsehood: (1) a desire for success, (2) fear of confrontation with the government, (3) popular theology (this can be secularized, idolatrous faith, or a confidence in God's faithfulness to take care of people no matter what they do. Popular theology may also be a form of doubt and

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[28]Isaiah 29:9-10.

[29]The first call is Isaiah 6. The preaching referred to is in Isaiah 7 and 8.

[30]Isaiah 8:11-15.

[31]Lecture by James Sanders (Claremont, CA: March 27, 1978).

[32]Crenshaw, p. 203.

[33]Jeremiah runs away in Jeremiah 28:11-12. He returns in Jeremiah 28:12-16.

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despair about God's justice and historical direction), (4) the power of tradition, and (5) emergence of individualism (individualism can develop into the ideology that God rewards goodness and punishes wickedness. Consequently, this can dichotomize society into the righteous and the sinners).[34]

The Radical Nature of Truth

In this section, I examine what made the messages of truth so difficult for the prophets to deliver. A helpful way to look at this prophetic literature, as we make this investigation, is one proposed by James Sanders in Torah and Canon. He proposes seven principal categories in this literature:[35]

Category 1: The prophet's call and credentials--composed of autobiographic and biographic material.

Category 2: Israel's story of epic tradition and canonical history and other references.

Category 3: Pleas of the prophet for the people to repent and pleas to God to have mercy and relent.

Category 4: Indictments which the prophet has against the people's social injustice, idolatry and other sin.

Category 5: Judgement sentences pronounced against the people because of their sin.

Category 6: The statement of the purpose of judgement for purging and recreation.

Category 7: Restoration as a new creation; God is radically free to take that which has been ruined, no matter how drastically, and make a new creation with new call and credentials.

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[34]Crenshaw, p. 65.

[35]Sanders, Torah and Canon, p. 75ff.

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The prophets who began with a message of reformation[36] did not stay with that message when the people did not change, but they went on to proclaim transformation.[37] As James Sanders says in Torah and Canon, "The prophets always start out crying, 'Repent!' and they never really give it up. But somewhere in their ministry they themselves appear to have come to the realization that reformation is in the end a self-deceptive exercise."[38] Isaiah condemned Hezekiah's reformation as a covenant with death, like the deception of the government's covenant or alliance with Egypt.[39] They proclaimed that God would totally uproot the old order of the status quo in order to make a new creation because the people needed reshaping.[40]

No one is excluded from the message of judgement. Category 5 is 100% judgement and includes the prophet and the prophet's community. As in Isaiah 6:11, no remnant escapes. The one that returned was reshaped, not because that one was good or belonged to the right political party or lived in the right or wrong section of town, but because God turned the total world upside down for transformation. The whole earth shakes in the chaos before salvation. Micah said, "Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins."[41] "Shall not the earth shake for this? Shall not all who live on it grieve? All earth shall

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[36]Category 3.

[37]Categories 4-7. This was true even when this meant judgement by fire and death.

[38]Sanders, Torah and Canon.

[39]Isaiah 22.

[40]Isaiah 11. [41]Micah 3:12.

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surge and seethe like the Nile and subside like the river of Egypt?"[42] People can not hide themselves in any way from this terror: "if they conceal themselves from me in the depths of the sea, there will I bid the sea serpent bite them."[43] This judgement[44] will be sheer terror. Through this purging[45] God will act as Creator and Redeemer to restore the remnant.[46] "Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel."[47] Since the prophets truthfully reinterpreted the old traditions according to their historical context, their prophecy confronted people (including the prophet) by showing them who they really were and condemned them and society "like a scream in the night."[48]

The radicalness of this message, both in the terror and completeness of the judgement and also in the radical freedom of God to create the order, shows us how the message could be so difficult to proclaim. Since the prophets delivered radical challenges to the government and to the people, calling for a new day and a new way of life, it is no wonder that the prophets were not popular in their own countries and that their messages were rejected by the kings and countryfolk. Ezekiel received scorn and derision.[49] Jeremiah's message sent him to the dungeon,[50] and when the princes heard it, they were so enraged they beat him. Also Obadiah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah suffered unpopularity and had to risk the possibilities of pain, imprisonment, and scorn for what they said.

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[42]Amos, The New English Bible, 8:8. [43]Ibid., 9:3.

[44]Category 5. [45]Category 6. [46]Category 7. [47]Jeremiah 31.4.

[48]Abraham Heschel, The Prophets (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 16.

[49]Ezekiel 20:8. [50]Jeremiah 37:16.

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They were described as fools and "madmen." Hosea interpreted his own anguish at the people's wrong doing: "The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred."[51] Jeremiah was called a madman and was the target of people's laughter in order to discredit his message. He broke social coventions and his messages uprooted the existing order of his day.[52] They called him a fool because of his passion for justice and his radical prophetic message. Hence, by the standards of the people in the prophets' context, they were indeed fools--gutsy, bold fools or mad persons because they dared to proclaim the message that showed life as it truly was. And if the prophets and their message were taken seriously, it would have disrupted the status quo and overturned the existing order; it would have been revolutionary.

The Prophets' Source of Courage and Power

The boldness and radicalness of the prophets' message and the misunderstanding and treatment they faced for proclaiming their messages raises the question about what gave them strength and courage to make and continue proclamation about the truth. One of these strengthening powers may have been their call. One of the most characteristic features of the prophets is their certainty of being called by Yahweh.[53]

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[51]Hosea 9:7. This passage shows what scholars have described as the prophetic agony. However, it is not the intention or within the scope of this paper to explore the prophet's inner self and personality.

[52]Jeremiah 20:7-8, from Crenshaw, p. 19. Other prophets, such as ecstatic prophets, were also called fools. (See II Kings 9:11, I Samuel 21:6.) However, I am restricting this discussion to classical prophets.

[53]Linblom, p. 182. Also notice this in Category 1.

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The prophetic office was surely not one they chose to enter. Each of the classical prophets points to an experience in which he was chosen by God as testified to in "the account of the call." These calls came about in different ways and the prophets responded to them according to their own personalities. Nevertheless, this experience helped equip them for their office and the account gave them an impelling source of courage to justify themselves in their own eyes and in other persons' eyes.[54]

In addition to this initial call, they had a continuing personal communion with Yahweh and received revelations that compelled them to prophesy to others. They felt commanded by a power stronger and greater than themselves compelling them to prophesy in a manner not unlike the way poets are inspired to write. Even when Jeremiah wanted to keep silent, the message burned in his heart. The revelations given to the prophets, whether through visions, auditions, or inspired ideas, were regarded as revelations from Yahweh.[55] They became mouth pieces of Yahweh to judge sinners, arouse dormant lives and influence people. Generally the vividness and power of their message proceeded from their inner stillness listening to the direction and word of Yahweh. They also loved their people; they were in solidarity with people--particularly poor and oppressed people and were conscious of serving

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[54]See Amos 7-9, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 103, Isaiah 6 and 8:11-15, Zechariah 1:7, 6:8. All are Category 1.

[55]Linblom, p. 108. They gave accounts of witnessing Yahweh's Heavenly Council composed of divine beings which surrounded Yahweh in heaven. (I Kings 22:19). After witnessing the Council make plans for God's action on earth, they felt they must reveal the word. (Isaiah 6:10, 13; Ezekiel 10, Amos 5).

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others.[56] Their love for people led them to plead to God in intercessory prayer for the people and to plead with the people to repent.

Forms of Prophetic Expression

In addition to attempting to relate the context to the text and hermeneutics through the content of their message, prophets also sought to relate the message through an appropriate form. The word of God was not restricted to written or spoken language, but it was perceived and conveyed in various other forms as well. This section of the chapter examines the word of God given by the prophets through philological forms and through sign and symbolic action. For the sake of clarity, first philology will be discussed and then non-verbal communication will be studied. However, even though they are studied separately here, it must be remembered that for the ancient Israelite people there was no dichotomy between the word given through symbolic actions and signs, and the word given through the mode of language. In fact, the people did not have a differentiation between word and object. Words were understood to contain something of the object itself in a non-rationalistic sense.

The message of the prophets was given power through the words and the literary forms they chose to convey it. The divine word of Yahweh represented an event which became an historical situation.[57] According to Linblom, there was essentially no difference between the word as an expression of the active power of Yahweh and the divine word given by the prophets.[58] According to Isaiah 1:2 and Micah 1:2, the

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[56]Linblom, p. 52. [57]Rad, II, 87. [58]Linblom, p. 117.

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word is worth the attention of the whole world. Amos and Ezekiel also spoke of the power of the divine word.[59] In Micah 1:10-15, the importance of place names suggests that associations possessed an almost creative power to conjure things.

Not only was the word itself powerful, but the language flowed to appeal to the listener and illustrate the content. Messages were conveyed with rhythm and sound that harmonized with emotional and imaginative language. According to Heschel, the words of the prophets were given through forms which were luminous and explosive, contingent, harsh and compassionate with a fusion of contradictions. He said that the images "don't shine; they burn."[60]

Plays on words were taken very seriously to release meanings and to establish a deeper understanding of the relatedness of this interpretation to their everyday meaning. Puns were a means to authenticate the message of the prophets. For example, in Amos 8:2 quayits means fruit which makes a play on qēts, meaning end; in Micah 5:10-13, cut also means make a covenant; in Micah 4:13 torah means both law and light; in Jeremiah 11:11ff 'saked'-- watching rod (or almond tree) sounds like 'sakad' meaning watch.

Hyperboles are also seen throughout the literature of the prophets. Isaiah 28:27 says, "Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cummin."[61] Isaiah asked a

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[59]Amos: 1:2, Ezekiel 7.

[60]Heschel, p. 6.

[61]This may be a wisdom saying added by a redactor, but nevertheless, it is a hyperbole. Another example of this kind of hyperbole is the scoffing of Isaiah telling the prophets that they talk baby talk (Isaiah 28:10ff) which I mentioned earlier in the paper.

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rhetorical question about an axe taking over the action of the chopper: "Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it?"[62] These and other word images in the literature help disclose meaning.

The prophets used these words of power in many different literary forms, according to the particular theme they wished to express. The prophetic word was delivered through satire and lamentations, rhetorical devices and caricatures, lyrics, and poetry, monologues and dialogues. Other messages were liturgical compositions such as Isaiah 33, Micah 7:7-20, Habakkuk and Nahum, and parts of Joel.[63] Sometimes the prophets posed as poets or minstrels. Songs they might have sung include the song of the Vineyards, the lament over the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:11ff, the Dirge of Amos and the Lament over Egypt.[64] Those who proclaimed their message publicly in speeches or sermons would start with a summons calling people to listen. The form used most often by the prophets was the oracle, a short, concise rhythmical form for public delivery.[65] The oracles were sometimes intentionally obscure and ambiguous such as "morning comes, and also night."[66] Usually the oracles referred to specific situations and were addressed to people wherever an audience would listen. Some speeches

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[62]Isaiah 10:15.

[63]Joel 1:15-20, 2:10ff, 17, 21:24. From Linblom 155 and 277.

[64]Ezekiel 32:18ff.

[65]Some oracles were revelations only to the prophet such as Isaiah 7, 31 and 30:2.

[66]Isaiah 21:12.

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were delivered where no humans listened. Ezekiel delivered a speech to the birds and beasts in Ezekiel 39:17ff.

Messages were given through the non-verbal forms of signs and symbolic actions. Early prophets used signs to project a detail of the future into the present, but classical prophets pointed to the events of their own times. Signs become close to being an actual prefiguration of the events to which they refer. Ezekiel had a whole series of actions in Chapters 4 and 5 to reinforce what he had to say: He sketched the siege of Jerusalem upon a brick; then he lay on his side to symbolize the guilt of Israel and its punishment; he ate small quantities of bread, an unclean food during the siege. He took a razor to divide his hair into three parts. He shaved and burned one section; he cut up a second section into pieces with a sword; the third section he threw to the wind. He bound what was left to the skirts of his robe and burned part of it. Jeremiah also used signs. He wore a wooden yoke and later an iron yoke, in Jeremiah 28, to emphasize his message. He also broke a flask, bought a field[67] to designate that land and houses should be bought in Judea, and he buried stones in a building entrance to demonstrate that a Babylonian King would one day set his throne on them.[68] Hosea used his marriage to Gomer to symbolize Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Isaiah used symbolic actions too, including going naked,[69] to indicate that the Assyrian King would lead the

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[67]The flask--Jeremiah 19:1ff, and the field--Jeremiah 32:6ff.

[68]Other symbolic actions of Jeremiah are recorded in Jeremiah 19:12a, 1-11 a, 14-15. From Rad, II, 98.

[69]Rad says he wore the dress of a deportee. Rad, II, 104.

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Egyptians and Etheopians away barefoot with their buttocks uncovered. All symbols, whatever they were, were representations of an occurrence which pointed beyond themselves to convince, to arouse emotions and to serve the total communication of the prophets.

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Chapter 2

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NATURE OF TRUE PROPHECY FOR DRAMA AND PUPPETRY

Introduction

This chapter examines some guidelines for developing and presenting puppetry and theatre pieces, which can be drawn from the previous discussion about the hermeneutical triangle of true prophecy, the seduction of false prophecy, the radical nature of the message, and the artistic forms.

Function of Form

The emphasis of a prophetic message is content, but the form acts as a tool in order for the content to be revealed with clarity and power. This study shows that the prophets did not restrict their communication to words but used symbols, action, and movement as well. We can recover a dimension of the unity of word and object in puppetry and drama. The word in this context can be given with creative power, with the strength of rhythm, sound, and perhaps music, to ignite the images. And just as the prophets used puns to authenticate their messages, puns are appropriate today to relate deeper meanings to everyday understandings. The hyperbole and other word images can help us view a situation with humor. In fact, irony and humor are helpful in communication, since somehow laughter has the efficacy to help us transcend our narrow vision to acknowledge the evil in our lives and in

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the world and begin to live with the truth.

Interpretation, or hermeneutics, in the fullest sense brings a message to understanding through the forms which give the fullest possible expression of the meaning. Movement or symbol, puppets or actors, music or dance may capture the emotion which words can not convey. Puppet theatre can bring together word, sign, symbol, music, dance, sculpture, mime, texts of plays, etc., to bring the hermeneutical presentation to understanding. Like the powerful forms of prophecy, the aesthetic forms of drama and puppet theatre have the power to touch our inner selves in a new way because they allow us to go beyond the words which speak more honestly about our lives. Just as Ezekiel used the action of shaving his head to strike home his message and the other prophets used signs and symbols to point beyond, so too, the action of the puppet or actor can become transparent to something much deeper and larger which is being communicated.

Criteria for Interpretation from the Hermeneutical Triangle

Now let us look at the hermeneutical triangle to see what criteria can be developed from the discussion presented on it in the first part of this paper. When one is going to produce a play for actors or puppets, one starts with a written text or writes a new one. The ancient texts of the prophets bore witness to the past for authority. They recited the ancient story of Israel relating faith and history in the market place.[1] In our contemporary setting the story of

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[1]James Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 55.

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our tradition is less clear for most people than it was for the Hebrew people. But, nonetheless, we have our own traditions depending upon our cultural background.[2] We build repertories within the particular subgroups of society. Within the theatre we develop repertories of ancient and contemporary plays. We choose from the various traditions or we weave them together, along with our own historical experience to create new original texts. In other words, we begin with a text(s) or tradition(s) according to our own background and preferences.

The act of choosing a text, in and of itself, sets the dynamic relation between the three aspects of the triangle in motion, because in order to select the proper text, one needs to have an awareness of the particular audience who will be listening. The choice of the tradition will be influenced by the age, the language, the economic and cultural situation of the people. For instance, a Shakespearean play done in Elizabethan English would usually not be appropriate for a group of farmworkers, but a piece by El Teatro Campesino, based on images from Aztec theatre, Mexican poetry and Chicano tales might be right on target. In South American countries, theatres were failing because they produced poor copies of foreign successes. Now they are beginning to find meaning by relating to the revolutionary struggle and the

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[2]Our stories today include ancient folk tales, epic ballads, tall tales, just-so stories, poems, legends, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, stories and jokes. They also include novels, magazines and the newspaper. We tell the stories of our own families, our ancestry and our country. The dramatic repertory for most people in this country is from television and movies. Within the churches, we have our favorite theologians, poets, philosophers, jokes, and stories. Sometimes we even refer to the Bible.

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traditions of the workers' songs and village legends.[3]

We can learn from the prophets who took the texts and gave them new power and meaning. If the classic texts are approached in a manner whereby the play must remain in the form it was created and played in the past, it becomes what Peter Brooke calls "Deadly Theatre."[4] However, if the whole hermeneutical triangle is applied and the tradition is re-interpreted according to the context, it is possible that these old traditions may be most befitting.

The necessity for sensitivity to the present situation for interpretation of a tradition, leads us to focus on the importance of discerning the context. People need relevant messages for their lives. We need to study the political situation of the times, like the prophets did. As children of God, as artists, we can not allow ourselves to remain indifferent to the social and political conditions of humankind. Indeed, as responsible Christians, we can not hide from the harsh and brutal realities that surround us in the 7:00 p.m. news and in the unpleasant conditions of our own lives and the lives of our sisters and brothers around the world. We need to expose the injustices which surround us through interpretations of traditions.

The particular message is not only determined by our particular historical context, but it is also determined by those to whom it is addressed. Maria Augusta Neal has said that for a long time persons have preached the Gospel of comfort and hope to the rich when it was

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[3]Peter Brook, The Empty Space (New York: Avon Books, 1968), p. 83.

[4]Brook, p. 9. The fixed form of Deadly Theatre is unlike Holy Theatre described in Chapter 5.

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intended for the poor, and preached challenge and judgement to the poor when it was intended for the rich.[5] It is important that we speak the right words to the dispossessed as well as saying the right words to the powerful. Naturally, one would not interpret the Magnificat the same way if it was addressed to a dictator as if it were addressed to the peasants of the land. A theatrical example of this is a Street Theater Minstrel satire on the Neutron bomb which was played on July 4th. While people were celebrating the might and military power of the nation on Independence Day, this piece acted as a solemn reminder of the lack of independence we have in reality--because of the possibility of the use and misuse of nuclear bombs.[6]

As we develop our hermeneutical interpretation of a play or other tradition, we need to beware of the danger of using it for our own propaganda. We need to do a proper exegesis and listen to what the author is saying before we begin our own interpretation. As Fuchs says, hermeneutics is a process of "seeking and finding the new place where the text, without detriment to its historical individuality, strikes home to us."[7] The original point makes a weighted vote in the final interpretation. It is not the only vote, however.[8] It should be read by dynamic analogy, posing the same challenge to the contemporary

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[5]Maria Augusta Neal, A Socio-Theology of Letting Go (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

[6]The satire presented a message we do not wish to hear--the message of 100% judgement (Category 5).

[7]Seanne Larson, "A Study of Hermeneutics" (A Senior Paper, Wesleyan University, 1977), p. 3.

[8]Lecture by James Sanders (Claremont, CA: Spring, 1978).

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equivalents of those mentioned in the text.[9] This also means that the finger of challenge should be pointed at ourselves as well as to those in society. An example of an original contemporary play which not only addresses the forces in society but also points the finger at the author is the Czech play, "Audience," by Valec Havel.[10] The play is a shattering expression of the call for rights and dignity for everyone in prison, not simply the ones such as the playwright or other famous people who make the headlines for their imprisonment.

Seduction of False Prophetic Communication in Puppetry and Theatre

I have presented some guidelines about theatre as prophetic communication according to the dynamic analogy of text, context and interpretation and discussed the relationship of form and aesthetics to the content of the message. However, despite the possibilities for expressing a prophetic message with any art form, we are limited in our ability to discern and speak the truth. It is hard to know true and false prophecy in our situation.[11] We must always remember that our message is only part of the truth, and we are subject to error. We must also be aware of the seductive power which attempts to keep us from facing and reflecting reality. We, like the prophets of old, walk the narrow line between being true prophets and being false prophets. We

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[9]James Sanders, "Hermeneutics," in The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), Supp. Vol., pp. 402-407.

[10]Valec Havel, "Audience," on The Night of Empty Chairs, a special television program from the November 1977 Amnesty International Program of words from political prisoners and dissidents from around the world.

[11]Lecture by James Sanders (Claremont, CA: February 4, 1978).

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are tempted to follow our own agenda and compromise the message for the same reasons which made the true prophets become false: (1) needs for success, (2) fear of the government, (3) popular views of the status quo, (4) static views of tradition and (5) our own ideas of individualism and a false dichotomy between the righteous and the unrighteous.

Like true prophecy, theatre must say the right word at the right moment to the right people. When they are true to the hermeneutical principles discussed in this paper, puppet theatre and drama do not fill people with the syrup of cheap grace or present a rotten imitation of life, but the arts delve deeper and deeper into the nature of reality to portray life as it really is. Instead of trying to create a cute or appealing show, artists need to face the destructiveness of our own lives and the condition of society with the honesty of playwrights, such as Growtowski, Brecht, Luis Valdez and Beckett. These dramatists as well as other artists and the old time prophets are united in their efforts to express their discontent in an aesthetic manner.

The Radical Nature of Prophetic Puppetry and Theatre

Although puppetry in America has been characterized by frivolous, glittery entertainment detached from the realities of life, there is a striking trend to use puppet theatre in moral, social, and political matters. This approach, however, is far more predominant in other countries. As Ryan Howard reported after viewing the shows he saw at the Puppet Festival in Barcelona, Spain, "puppeteers view their art not solely as a means of self expression, but also as an instrument for

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the expression of cultural identity."[12] The Puppet Festival was held in May, 1977, during the time of national elections. The local Catalans used their puppetry as an instrument for expressing their cultural identity and expressing social criticism. They took the tradition of the old legend of St. George and reinterpreted it, according to their context. The character of St. George represented a group of citizens. Instead of winning the princess for defeating the dragon, the citizens refused a prince as a reward because what they will really wanted was an autonomous government. Besides the local people, others from various countries used puppetry as a means of social commentary. The artists and festival participants were menaced by police and soldiers with machine guns, tear gas and billy clubs. Swedish puppeteers were attacked by police during their rehearsal, and others were dispersed at gunpoint.[13]

This reaction by the police to people who were presenting puppet theatre in the streets shows some of the consequences of drama when it faces the truth about the context through an interpretation of an old tradition. Undoubtedly, they offered a radical message, but just as the prophets' context dictated the radicalness of their message, the historical situation of the world today often demands the same kind of uprooting and revolutionary message the prophets dared to make. As we look to the prophets and remember that their historical context dictated

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[12]Ryan Howard, "The Fourth Barcelona Puppet Festival," Puppetry Journal, 29, 3 (November-December 1977), p. 53

[13]Howard. Part of the police brutality arose from action by other political demonstrators. However, since the content of the puppet theatre and parades at the festival was a means of political commentary, the police made no discrimination.

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that they move beyond a message of reformation to a shattering revolutionary message, it strikes a somber chord for us, and we are tempted to back off from the message of truth because we do not want to look at our own destructiveness and the situation of society. Yet, when we study the context of our own times we begin to realize that in most cases our message must move beyond reformation. What is needed for our times is a revolution of our hearts and of our whole political and societal order. And that message is a painful message to proclaim. It warns us of the 100% judgement for all. In its dramatic form the shape is tragedy. Yet the prophets also present the promise of recreation and redemption after destruction. They remind us that if we allow God freedom, God can move through the suffering of the present horrible situation to create a new order. This, to me, is the most radical message and the most difficult to understand. It is the folly and the faith of the prophets.

A puppet theatre group which boldly portrays life in its brutality, and also shows transformation, is the Bread and Puppet Theatre. It is a troupe from the United States which delves into the nature of life with word, symbol, liturgical forms, music,[14] masks, puppets, pageantry, and theatre. The shows, which face many different themes on the human condition, are based on ancient stories and myths reinterpreted to portray our present situation. They focus on the terribleness of greed and brutality, the dumbness of self-concern, the excesses of gluttony and greed, the power of fear, and the destructiveness of war and everything that bankrupts life. But the

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[14]These are all forms which the prophets used.

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Bread and Puppet Theatre also shows that life is sacred. Even in their most tragic pieces, such as "The Cry," there is a sense of life, though imperfect, is animated by an aspiration which seeks to transcend itself. In scenes of ordinary life, gestures move beyond the ordinary to affirm the sacredness of the ordinary. For instance, in a banquet scene from their play, "Ishi," the dinner turns into gluttony, and then it becomes a scene of the Last Supper. Their Annual Ressurrection Circus, in its simplicity, celebrates the ordinary and sacralizes life.[15]

If we proclaim the radical truth of judgement and of transformation after the purging in puppet theatre and other dramatic forms, we, like the prophets, may be called fools. Yet we need not reject this label if it means that we speak the truth. But just as the prophets were scorned and threatened with imprisonment or other consequences for the harshness of their message, the consequences for contemporary theatre which mirrors our social context may be costly for us. I have already mentioned the police brutality which occurred at the Puppet Festival in Barcelona, Spain. Pantomime actors were also arrested in Barcelona and sentenced to two years in prison for a satire, "Esperpento," which the military court said injured the reputation of the army.[16] The jewish "Refusednik" Theatre in Russia used the text of the Torah and the writings of Alexander Pushkin to develop a satire theatre. As a result of the message the theatre has been closed down;

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[15]For more information on Bread and Puppet Theater, see Appendix A.

[16]Stanley Meisler, "In Today's Spain, Art Imitates Life at Great Peril," Los Angeles Times (March 12, 1978), Part 5, p. 2.

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they have been denied permission to emigrate; and they are treated as outcasts by the rest of Russian society.[17]

Reasons Why We Create

We proclaim the message (whether it be any of the categories the prophets used, including reformation, pleas for repentence, sentences of judgement, or reasons for purging or transformation) through drama or puppet theatre or whatever means we have, according to our current social situation when we are impelled to convey the message of faith witnessed by people in each generation. Then we interpret and convey the message, as we understand it, because we have no choice but to speak when we open our eyes to the awful contrast between what is going on in the world and the possibilities of vision God offers. Then as children of God, our compassion leads us to such concern that we speak and act because we are moved by our passion for justice and our pain when we see the disasters of this world.

Our message through drama, or puppetry, is a scream in the night--not a scream of revenge, but a cry for people to see, to see what we are doing to one another, an appeal to look at the selfishness and hate in our own selves, to repent and to turn around--to turn around before the injury has become too great, to turn around before we have destroyed ourselves and the whole world with us, through the moment-by-moment deaths of prejudice, subjugation, sexism, ageism, racism, hunger, oppression, and sudden annihilation of nuclear war. This is the mirror of our times. We must have the courage and the insight which

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[17]Dan Fisher, "'Refusednik Theater' A Desperate Act," Los Angeles Times (June 11, 1978), Part 1-S, p. 1, 2.

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characterized the prophet to hold up his mirror to ourselves and for others to see. And as we proclaim the message of judgement, we need to remember the radical notion of faith: although the present order is destroyed, God remains our God and is free to take the situation, no matter how drastic, to make a new creation.

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PART II

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Chapter 3

THE BEGINNING IDEA AND SEARCH FOR A TRADITION

Introduction to Part II

Like the Old Testament Prophets, "The Esther Project"[1] sought to communicate the truth and act as a mirror to ourselves and to the world about us. Part II of this project describes the interdisciplinary process by which we developed the theatre piece, "Esther," through a collective hermenautic. Chapter 1's background study on the Old Testament prophets and Chapter 2's guidelines, based upon the nature of true prophecy, serve as a basis for reflection and evaluation of the project's hermeneutical process. Part II illustrates the values inherent in our interdisciplinary, communal, egalitarian method and the particular artistic forms used in "The Esther Project" to communicate our interpretation.

Part II tells our story of "The Esther Project" from the initial idea through the unfolding of the communal creation to the final happening. Emphasis is placed on the process leading up to the production because this was as significant as the theatrical presentation. Part II creates pictures of our interaction: I tell the story of how people's lives came together; how we talked, laughed and

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[1]"The Esther Project" refers to the whole corporate interdisciplinary process we developed to study and interpret the book of Esther into the experimental theatre piece with masks, puppets and music. This term shall be used henceforth to refer to that process or any aspect of it.

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searched our hearts and the text for meaning; how we were grasped by the text and our interaction with it and one another. From time to time, I will pause as a storyteller and reflect upon the values and shortcomings of our actions. It is not in the design of this project to reflect all our failures. However, I will note that much of our learning and creative insight evolved from trial and error.

I have structured the narration of our study and creative process into seven chapters. This third chapter, "The Beginning Idea and Search for a Tradition," examines the genesis of our idea and the task of finding an appropriate tradition. In Chapter 4, our communal exegesis and interpretation through discussion is described. Chapter 5 looks at Holy Theatre, puppets, masks and ritual modes, tells how we used them in our interpretation, "Esther," and evaluates these forms according to the guidelines for puppet theatre and drama outlined in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 describes ways we interpreted Esther through a variety of disciplines. In Chapter 7, the narration is concluded with reflections and evaluations of the entire interdisciplinary communal process in "The Esther Project."

Although this narration is segmented into these different topics, our process was not. From beginning to end, study, reflection, interpretation, and creation flowed from one to the other. Biblical study and artistic expression, theory and praxis, form and content, political analysis, and community formation were integrated at each stage.

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Emergence of an Idea

Puppetry had been an interest of mine for years, but I had seldom talked about the possibilities of the art or shared dreams about doing a group presentation. I assumed people were not interested and I was afraid persons considered puppetry childish or shallow. After I attended the National Puppetry Festival in 1977, however, I could no longer contain my excitement about puppet theatre. I shared my enthusiasm about the artistry I had seen and the possibilities for creating puppet theatre communally. John, Karen, Steve, and Ron[2] became excited, and our enthusiasm bubbled up into plans to produce puppet theatre at the School of Theology. We decided to present proposals to the Drama Group and Arts Council requesting permission to produce puppet theatre. In October, both groups granted approval for a spring production.

Our small group of friends established a collective process that continued throughout the project. We shared our excitement, brainstormed ideas and planned the proposal by concensus. Each of us brought his or her particular abilities, traditions, and philosophy to this communal sharing. A process evolved with values: (1) creation through a communal process, (2) participation as equals, (3) decision by concensus and (4) each person's contributions of values, time and ideas.

Our collective beginning bestowed power upon the evolving creative process. The five who began the simple conversations formed the core group of writers and became the leaders in the production. We

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[2]John Linscheid, Karen Campbell, Ron Robertson and Steve Dominguez. Throughout the rest of this project the participants are referred to by first name only. See page 141 for full names.

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shared our excitement with others, and I invited everyone in the community to join us:

> ....Since puppet theatre needs many different talents--from sculpture to acting, sewing, lighting, etc., I hope this can be an experience in which we share our different talents in a corporate creation.[3]

Others caught our enthusiasm. The production which had its roots in communion among a few friends, eventually involved over sixty people; each brought his or her gifts to share in the corporate creation.

Search for the Right Tradition

The production of puppet theatre requires either an established tradition or the creation of a new one, as Chapter 2 indicates. The dynamic interrelation between tradition, context and hermeneutics was set in motion by the search for and choice of our tradition. The Guidelines developed in Chapter 2 designate two criteria which should be used in searching for a puppet theatre or dramatic tradition:

1. The choice should consider the present sociopolitical-religious context.

2. The context of the particular audience (including factors such as culture, health, age, sex, race, economic and social status) should be considered in order to provide appropriate theatre.

The theatre director normally chooses the tradition for everyone else to create, even in a corporate production. Therefore, I began to search for a tradition which interested me. During the rest of the fall, I read Medieval Mystery and contemporary plays, studied puppet

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[3]Theresa Mason, from a note sent January 23, 1978 to everyone at the School of Theology, Claremont, California.

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theatre and looked at stories and Biblical texts. Despite considerable thought, I could not decide which play to pick, so I went back to the group and asked them to help decide.[4] I am glad for my trouble over making a decision; I had moved away from communal decision making. My indecision sent me back to the group, and consequently, involved them in the choice. Our corporate selection of a tradition was a significant part of the hermeneutical process. After exploring a number of options, we decided to create experimental theatre based upon a Biblical text.

We then discussed the values and goals that we wanted for our puppet theatre. Values we sought included: (1) an opportunity to explore puppetry as a viable artistic expression; (2) an opportunity to explore and express our ethical and religious ideas; and (3) a community building experience. I described some examples of puppet theatre which could enrich our creation. I had been influenced by the Bread and Puppet Theatre mentioned in Chapter 2,[5] and I described their purpose and style. Later, others from the group joined me in attending a live presentation, "Ave Maria Stella,"[6] by the Bread and Puppet Theatre. It was a moving experience. We decided to shape our creation in a similar style.[7]

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[4]This is one example that shows we learn by trial and error.

[5]See Page 33.

[6]"Ave Maria Stella" (Hail Mary Star of the Sea) is a Mass written by Josquin des Press 1445-1521. Bread and Puppet Theatre's presentation combined this ritual's medieval and renaissance stories about Mary. The puppet theatre event interwove tragedy, satire, beauty, humor, poignance, symbols, puns, giant and miniature puppets, masks, ritual, hymns, bread, garlic and glorious artistry.

[7]See Appendix, p. 172 for an outline on Bread and Puppet Theatre's values which influenced us.

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Our process of selecting tradition and form was analogus to the methods used by the ancient prophets discussed in Part I. Actually, our original dynamics were a process of imagination, intuition, excitement, and exploration of possibilities for our study and message. It would have been presumptuous of us to think we could be like the Old Testament prophets. Nevertheless, analogies can be drawn between certain features which influenced both the ancient prophets and our procedure. The hermeneutical triangle is one of these analogies. As we searched for an appropriate tradition, the dynamic relation between the three points of the hermeneutical triangle were already in motion. Our particular context rendered a major influence upon the selections we even considered. A second analogy is, like the ancient prophets, we did not wish to restrict our message only to verbal form, but chose to use signs and symbolic action as well.

The group established some criteria to help us select a tradition we could all embrace. First, our choice to use a dramatic medium for our reinterpretation of a tradition predetermined which selections would be appropriate. In particular, we wanted an intepretation which would lend itself to using drama, masks, puppetry, music and movement. Second, we wanted a text that manifested themes about the fundamental issues of existence; in particular--themes about the use and abuse of power, liberation and social justice. Third, we

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wanted a tradition that engaged us[8]--one that spoke to our lives. We did not simply want to please ourselves and the audience; we wanted to challenge and inspire; we looked for a text that disturbed us and provoked us, one which could give rise to new insights about who we are. As Walter Wink states, "It is because we do not know who we are, that we need the text."[9]

Our search continued: often a group of us could be found around a lunch table discussing potential traditions. During one of these lunch time discussions, Linda suggested that we base the play upon the book of Esther. She told us about the Jewish tradition of writing and producing a play based upon Esther at Purim, and how a local church had also studied and reinterpreted Esther. She gave us a synopsis of the story. It appeared that we had found our text. Later we read Esther and did some Biblical study to confirm the choice. The story incorporated themes of power and the abuse of power, sexism, racism, prejudice and the struggle for hope by an oppressed people.[10] These themes interested us, and we thought they would interest our audience. Esther could be dramatically portrayed with the style of puppet theatre

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[8]The criterion which requires that the tradition engage the participants is relevant to persons in many types of settings whenever the group chooses to do a long term production. If the group is writing, the text needs the power to capture the interest of the writers and later capture the attention of the audience. Usually the texts have many layers of meaning which will involve the writers in background study. Eventually, people may discover the text did not have the themes they desired, but if it is engaging enough, a new depth and understanding can result both in understanding the text and one's own situation.

[9]Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 73.

[10]James Sanders, from a consultation, February 10, 1978.

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we had chosen. The story ignited our enthusiasm; its content had significance for our lives and for our society. The tradition, Esther, clicked with our criteria. We rejoiced! We had found our tradition!

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Chapter 4

CORPORATE BIBLICAL STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Normally only one person researches and interprets a text for the benefit of the wider community. However, in "The Esther Project" we studied collectively during the exegesis[1] and the hermenuetical process. We came together to study Esther to learn from the text and from one another; we were each other's teachers, each other's students. Each of us possessed some knowledge which we shared to serve the communal study and interpretation. When one person raised an interesting point, a whole new set of questions and ideas would be kindled for the group. Walter Wink describes this type of process:

> Communal exegesis of this sort overcomes the "expert ethos" of professional scholarship, since each person is the primary resource for how the text resonates in her or him. At the same time the deprivatized, corporate context cures the solipsism of scholarly practice. The interpreter needs the mediation of the felt responses of others in order to discover how he or she is affected by the text's address.[2]

The development of this communal process was one of the primary

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[1]Exegesis refers to a method of studying a Biblical text in order to understand the original text's meaning. Exegesis involves a disciplined inquiry into the text and its background to investigate the passage's "what," "why," "who," "how," and "where." The process is similar to analysis of any literary work, yet special tools are required such as "textual criticism" to determine the most reliable version of the original text.

[2]Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 63.

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values of "the Esther Project." This chapter seeks to convey the excitement and vitality of our corporate study and hermeneutical discussions. We recorded each session of our communal study. Quotes from these recordings are used throughout the chapter to try to capture the dynamics of our interaction.

The first section of the chapter narrates key components of our corporate exegesis, and the second section discloses highlights of our hermeneutical discussions. Following these narrations, I will evaluate our corporate methods. The hermeneutical guidelines set forth in Chapter 2 will be used in this analysis.

Exegetical Study

We needed the disciplined study of exegesis to help us listen to the intended message of the text in its own context so that we could understand its meaning better for our context.

Walter Wink warns "our way of reading must...be examined for its implicit ideological biases and blindness."[3] All who formed the collective study group, after Esther was picked as a text, were students at the School of Theology in Claremont, California. The school was in its final year of a curricular theme which attempted to re-unite global consciousness with a spiritual formation. This theme intensified our concerns about global hunger, injustice, Christian responsibility in a world of scarcity, prejudice and other social concerns. Most of us questioned institutional structures; we all had questions about power

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[3]Ibid., p. 45.

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and the abuse of power. We had varied theological positions, from Process Theology to Neo-Orthodox, but most of us were committed to the concerns of Liberation Theology. We ranged from absolute pacifism to stances sympathetic with violent liberation movements. Our common commitment was to create an artistically valid interpretation of Esther. All of these attitudes, plus our total social context affected the way we approached the text. Yet, this was our own particular historical context, just as the ancient prophets approached the text out of their particular context.

Exegesis helped us move from our particular situation and stance to the situation and stance of the ancient text.[4] Bringing our individual backgrounds, we gathered around to listen to what Esther had to say to our own concrete problems, society and questions about life.

Before our first communal session, I asked people to read the whole Esther text. Then we joined to share our initial responses. We compared the thematic oppression of the Jews in Esther to the plight of contemporary undocumented Mexicans and other oppressed Third World people. Many ideas raised in this first discussion were continued and

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[4]For more background information about the nature and methods of Biblical exegesis consult:

Norman Hamel, Literary Criticism of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

Otto Kaiser and Werner G. Kümmel, Exegetical Method: A Students Handbook, Trans. E.V.N. Goetchius (New York: Seabury Press, 1963).

Ralph Klein, Textual Criticism of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

Edgar Krentz, The Historical Critical Method (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

Gerhard Lohfink, The Bible Now I Get It! An Entertaining Look at the Bible for People Who Think They Know It Already (Garden City: Doubleday, 1979).

Richard N. Soulen, "Exegesis," in his Handbook of Biblical Criticism (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1971), p. 57-58.

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expanded in subsequent study.

In the next few sessions we chose to read the book aloud together. We noted differences among translations.[5]

Ron: I like this poetry.
Theresa: Mmmmmmmmm (sounding pleased).
Karen: That's good; that's better (referring to translation)
Theresa: Yeah, that's The New English (Bible).
Ron: Nice language, too.[6]

I prepared exegetical notes[7] which I distributed to each member of the group, and I brought resource materials to the sessions for further research. These notes and resources helped us when we found difficult places in the text to understand:

Karen: (After reading Esther 8:11)....sounds like what the decree said was to defend yourself, and then in (she reads verse 13)...."Jews to avenge themselves." So I'm confused.
Theresa: Some writers said that "defend" was a gloss someone wrote in later to make them look better.

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[5]When we read together we used The King James, The Revised Standard, The New English Bible, The Anchor Bible, The Good News Bible, and the Jerusalem Bible.

[6]"The Esther Project," February 23, 1978.

[7]Books which we used for the exegetical background on Esther include the following:

Bernard W. Anderson, "Introduction and Exegesis, The Book of Esther," The Interpreters Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1974), III.

Elias Bickerman, Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther (New York: Schoken Books, 1967).

John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

Dorothea Harvey, "Esther," in The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), II, 149-152.

Carey A. Moore, Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971).

For further information about the book of Esther see a book published since our study:

Sandra Beth Berg, The Book of Esther: Mofits, Themes and Structure (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

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Karen: So the decree might have been: "You have a right to kill whoever hates you, and it doesn't mean you have to wait for them to attack."[8]

The resources helped us with places in the text where the meaning was confusing:

Dennis: You see he (Haman) didn't die when he was hanged....It says when the king came in they covered his face - which is a euphemism for "he died." I suggest: "As the words left for mouth of the king, they" - being somebody who just kind of waltzed in....(and) "covered his face"....the guy kind of croaked right there and then.
Theresa: (After checking the Anchor Bible.) In the actual text, it doesn't mean he died.
Dennis: Oh.
Theresa: It's more like: He blushed or became pale - turned pea green (is how it translates).[9]

We researched the meaning of literary phrases and names:

Linda: What about the dual names (for Esther)? Is there anything on that?
Theresa: Hadassah was Esther's Jewish name, which means myrtle - fragrant and sort of a healing balm to everyone.
Linda: Mmmmmmmmm (sensuously).
Theresa: "Esther" is from "Ishtaar" the Babylonian goddess of love.
Karen: Wow!
Theresa: And Haman's wife, "Zeresh" means: disheveled hair. (Laughter from everyone.)[10]

We discovered two plots interwoven in the book Esther as it is in the Canon. In the first plot Esther, a Jewess, becomes a Persian queen, but Haman, the court prime minister endangers her position, her life and the life of her people. She saves herself and her people by her courage and sends Haman to the gallows. The second plot centers around Haman and Mordecai. Haman hates Mordecai, a Jewish courtier, so

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[8]"The Esther Project," March 2, 1978. This quote shows an example of redaction critism. Redaction criticism looks for places where the editors or translators made changes in the text.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid., February 23, 1978.

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he prepares the gallows for him, but by accident the king discovers Mordecai's past services and orders Haman to honor his rival.

I gave homework assignments for people to prepare different components of study for the total group. Each person contributed her or his own research and ideas to the sessions. John, for instance, analyzed the structure of the total narrative and outlined the major parts and the smaller units within the story:

> John: In three major sections - the first one being the rise to power of various people.
> Ron: Mmmmmmmmm (sounding interested).
> John: And the second one - the struggle for power among the various people.
> Ron and Theresa together: Hhhhhhhhhmmmmmmmmm (growing enthusiasm).
> John: And the last one is the ends of power
> Ron, Theresa and Sue: aaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhoooooo00000HH! (with great enthusiasm).[11]

We looked for the action words: tremble, filled with wrath, destroy, ill, perish, grieved. We researched and discussed major themes and lead mofits:

> Linda: One thing which goes on throughout the whole story is the gallows....The thing that is oppressive is the gallows themselves.
> Karen: And the power that allows them to remain.
> Steve: So what you have with the gallows up there is a symbol of death....also of what they mistakenly think of as life.[12]

We considered the historical intention of the author and the purpose for including it in the Canon of the Bible.

> Mitze: Is the sense here in making the oppressed look or not look any better than anyone else?
> Ron: That oppression is always evil, but I'm sure the reason it was canonized was a slightly different thrust: God can do what God wants and no amount of kingly power or conniving can upset that. And I can see us choosing to accept that.
> Theresa: It was canonized for other reasons too....(to create an

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[11]Ibid., March 31, 1978.

[12]Ibid., February 23, 1978.

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> ideology for) Purim, and as a nationalistic theology to celebrate the deliverance of a people who are continually faced with extinction....It's a hope against hope.[13]

We decided not to interpret the text as an ideology for Purim. "The church does not celebrate Purim and so doesn't need an explanation of the festival's origins."[14] Separated from the explanation and validation of Purim, the Esther tradition took on a life of its own.

Interpreting Esther Through Discussion

Esther addressed us with questions that provoked us, questions that confused us, and questions that forced us to listen to how our own identity and our own society were being addressed. In our discussions we compared the historical context of Esther with our own historical-social-political-religious situation. One of the major themes in Esther is the issue of prejudice against the Jews:

> Theresa: The degree is a reflection of the prejudice against the Jews....
> John: ....like the whole Jewish "threat" they're really trying to get control. Look at all the control they already have.
> Linda: That's the way Haman goes about it. Haman lets the king know they would be better if they (the Jews) don't assimilate....there's certain people scattered about. Their laws are different from any other people. They don't keep the same laws; it's not profitable to tolerate them.
> Sue: They don't even speak the same language.[15]
> Theresa: Mordecai is a possible threat to Haman and Haman knows that. It's like someone becoming an executive who's worked for it all of his or her life....and (then) have a minority come up and quickly move into office who is young and inexperienced, but

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[13]Ibid., March 2, 1978.

[14]John Linscheid, "Hermeneutics and 'The Esther Project'" (Elkhart, IN: 1979), p. 13.

[15]"The Esther Project," March 31, 1978.

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very capable.[16]

We compared the Israeli situation of our own context with the historical situation.

Steve: Has anyone at all reflected upon the current situation in the Middle East vis-a-visa the Israelis and the Palestinains?
John: Yeah.
Steve: And if there are any familiar patterns there with what we're talking about (in Esther)....it seems to me that quite a bit of that is being played out in the Middle East currently (he goes on to explain).
John: It's just incredible.
Sue: Isn't it?
Steve: You have a Palestinian raid and you have a big air strike; you have a Palestinian raid on some buses, so 30 Israelis get killed on the buses and you (Israel) wipe(s) out 2000 Palestinians in Lebanon....[17]

We were amazed by the similarity between the situation in Esther and contemporary liberation movements:

Karen: ....(the) oppressed take on the oppressor's values.
Steve: The tragedy of the whole thing of what happens is the structure of the whole thing remains unalterable; we just switch parts....somehow it's like an illiteration which does nothing but move one group to the top and the top group down; (it) is a false liberation.[18]

The interpretive comparisons evoked symbols that reflected the connections between the two contexts:

Karen: I see Haman as this power-hungry, money-hungry person. Maybe we could make Haman into a Bank of America executive.
Theresa: The king could order his banquets on his Bank America Card. (Group laughter) And then it's validated when he's run it through the credit card machine.
Karen: What the decrees do in the story is to legitimize action, OK? And that's what our money does for us; we use money, we use our ability to charge things to legitimate the values to accumulate, you know?
Theresa: (Endorsing the comment) Hhhhhmmmmm.
Karen: ....It just symbolized our economy.[19]

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[16]Ibid., March 7, 1978

[17]Ibid., March 31, 1978. [18]Ibid., February 23, 1978.

[19]Ibid., March 7, 1978.

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When we allowed the text to ask questions of our society and of ourselves, we, in turn, thought of questions to ask one another and turned back to the text again with our own questions.

> Steve: Now what I'm suggesting is that this business of going to the gallows, of going to death, is a matter of choice, because as Linda was saying earlier, it's some kind of crossroads with the people. Either they fall into the pattern or they don't, so somehow to highlight that, it's (the death choice) not necessary. But the question arises like for Neibuhr, how is it inevitable; why is it that we choose death?
>
> Theresa: Is the choice the same for everyone? Is the choice the same for the Persians as it is for the Jews who are a minority?[20]

We were advised by Nelle Morton to think about images and movements which we had never seen before.[21] She suggested that we get to the core of the text to see it and the world with new eyes. We asked: "What do you see? What do you hear in a new way? What images operate on their own? What are some new images to express the core without hanging on to old ones?" This process led us to deeper questions about the text, our own historical context and our own selves. Going to the depths had a profound seriousness to it, but the way we looked at ourselves and our context also became humorous when it enabled us to laugh at ourselves:

> Karen: I would like (the play) to make some satirical statements on ourselves....
>
> Theresa: That's true; we need to laugh at ourselves.
>
> John: Maybe that is where Mordecai and Esther need to be us. Maybe Mordecai and Esther need to be the revolutionary types, as the people to transform the system and are really trapped by it.
>
> Theresa: Really trapped by it--I like that.
>
> Karen: That's good.
>
> John: I mean you could even have Esther picked because she does not fit into the mold. She is at least different from all of the others....We could always make Haman be the symbol of what we always oppose and the king the symbol of the power structures.

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[20]Ibid., March 6, 1978.

[21]Nelle Morton, personal interview (February 19, 1978).

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Karen: Maybe Mordecai--as the model we think we all want to attain.

John: We should have Mordecai be us, at least at the very beginning-Mordecai should be the type that we want to be, so that at the end, it's a little more upsetting.[22]

We had become so engrossed in making socio-political comparisons and critiques of the society around us that we had almost forgotten to see how the text addressed us.

Evaluation of Our Corporate Exegesis and Hermeneutics

Our background exegetical research and hermeneutical discussion needs to be evaluated according to the guidelines established in Chapter 2 and according to the value of the communal study and interpretation. However, the hermeneutical process continued, as we wrote the script, created masks, puppets, etc., until our final production of "Esther." Since this narration continues in the next chapters, this chapter's evaluation refers only to the highlights given so far and the evaluation will continue in Chapter 7.

The guidelines of the Hermeneutical Triangle established in Chapter 2 can be summarized as follows:

1. Start with a text or tradition.
2. Apply proper exegesis and listen to what the author is saying before beginning interpretation.
3. Discern the context.
   a. Discern the text's historical context.
   b. Study and discern the socio-political-religious context of our own time.

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[22]Ibid., March 7, 1978.

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c. Determine the particular situation of those persons to whom the message will be addressed.

4. Interpret the passage according to the whole heremeneutical triangle:

a. Read the ancient message according to dynamic analogy posing the same challenge today as in ancient times.

b. Reinterpret the tradition according to the present day context.

c. Seek to say the right word at the right moment to address both society and ourselves.

5. Do not use the text for propaganda.

6. Remember that we are subject to error and false prophecy.

Our interpretation actually began before our communal exegesis when we started looking for a text which would address certain values and which could be adaptable for interpretation through the medium of puppet theatre. Therefore, since we didn't begin with a written text and apply our exegesis before we interpreted it, we slighted the first and second guidelines. Rather than simply listening to the text in the beginning, we continually dialogued with it. Because we returned to the text again and again to ask what it was saying, I think our interrelationship between exegesis and hermeneutics had validity.

We were weakest in making a properly executed exegesis communally (Guideline 2). Although I gave people homework to prepare for sessions, I did the majority of the study for the sake of time. We should have undertaken a more systematic and rigorous exegetical study in the beginning. I should have distributed more of the exegetical tasks among the group. We would have benefited from more time to

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carefully exegete the text and discuss our research. Notes from our taped sessions were usually distributed, but persons who missed a session, were not able to benefit by the nuances and depth not recorded in writing. Another weakness was that too often we accepted the suggestions the Biblical commentators made, without testing them against the text. And finally, we should have considered the text's original intentions more often.

When we interpreted the text (Guideline 3) we spent too much time considering our own socio-political-religious situation (Guideline 3b). This may have prevented us from listening fully to what the text was saying in its own particular context (Guideline 3a). However, we did spend considerable time comparing the historical context with our context. We were sensitive to the needs and concerns of the audience to whom the play was to be addressed (Guideline 3c).

Since we did not pursue the author's intention to build an ideology for Purim, we did not pose that some message for our time as was used in ancient times (Guideline 4). If we avoid considering the original point of a text, we risk isogesis, or prooftexting, which intentionally uses the Biblical witness to express what the interpreters want it to say. However, the original point is not the only point of the text.[23] Seeking the truth in hermeneutics does not simply involve reiterating the author's original insight or retelling what the text says. James Sanders says that the Bible gives us indications of what

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[23]James Sanders, Class Lecture, Spring, 1978. He calls hermeneutics which is bound to reiterate the original point "constituative hermeneutics." See James Sanders, "Hermeneutics," in The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), Supp. Vol. pp. 402-407.

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the important original points are and tells us how to make "them address our context to further theological horizons."[24] We need to read the Bible as a paradigm of God's activity in the world for all times and transfer its challenge to our context through dynamic analogy (Guideline 4a).[25] Then symbols from the written text can address our own understanding and speak to us through the ages to our own times. We did address our current context with the message of the text (Guideline 4b).

Although our exegetical analysis and hermeneutics were not exacting, they did help us to separate the text's message from our own pre-existing notions (Guideline 5). We were conscious of the importance of listening to the intention of the story and allowing it to keep its own integrity. By studying corporately, we helped remind each other to listen to the text and that we were each subject to error (Guideline 6). Our communal approach insured that no one person imposed his or her interpretation upon the text (Guideline 5). It is likely our process would have been even richer if persons from a wider socio-political-religious background had participated. For example, having a Jewish participant would have added a different viewpoint to our interpretation and perhaps would have led us to give greater consideration to Purim. Our corporate study and discussion unleased insights which one person alone might not have picked up.

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[24]Sanders, "Hermeneutics," p. 407.

[25]Ibid., p. 406-407.

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We shared our enthusiasm, our ideas, laughter, values and frustrations in our sessions. Sometimes friends stayed up past midnight conversing about the meaning and our interpretation of Esther. Our sense of community grew and our friendships deepened.

The following quote from my journal expresses some of the nature of our interaction and my own reponses to it:

> The creative process is hard to describe--energy level is high; it's freedom to share our ideas and get them revoked; it's perception; it's relating.
>
> In the learning process, the teacher/learner dichotomy is erased. So far, professors have acted as advisors and participants. Their advice has been helpful and a great resource--kindling new ideas and new questions.
>
> We learn from each other. I hear another's idea which "gets rolling" a whole new set of ideas for myself. Having training in Old Testament, theology, and other subjects undoubtedly helps the process along, yet we are each other's teachers, each other's learners.
>
> Somehow in the process, the "I" drops and the "We" emerges. It's a vitalizing process. My life is full in being a part of the process. I get so excited about what is happening. I wake in the middle of the night and lie there thinking in amazement about the process of it. It's like falling in love--the reaction I have--totally energized by it--excitement, resiliency, high hope, vitality.
>
> Vitality and enthusiasm: we catch it from one another. What is there about it which so captivates us all and turns us on fire?
>
> Part of it is a way to say, "Look, see, this is something we care about incredibly. Look at what is happening in our world. Look how we are involved in the destructive process ourselves." It's showing the world how we see it--revealing the truth about what we feel, fragmented though that be; it's witness; it's prophecy. Hey, look at life--all of us--let us see in a new way who we are.[26]

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[26]Theresa Mason, Notes from Journal, March, 1978.

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Chapter 5

ARTISTIC FORMS IN THE ESTHER PROJECT

Introduction

The creation and development of artistic forms in "The Esther Project" continued our hermeneutical process and expressed the meaning of that interpretation. Artistic forms are symbolic of human feeling[1] and are used to articulate ideas.[2] Form and content are not the same, but they are related. Forms are either empty or they express content. "When the form is right, form and thought become one."[3] They fuse then as Samuel Beckett describes:

> The form, structure and mood of an artistic statement can not be separated from its meaning, its conceptual content; simply because the work of art as a whole is indissolubly linked with the manner in which it is said, and cannot be said in any other way.[4]

Chapter 2 outlined guidelines for forms based on Old Testament Prophecy. These guidelines for puppetry and theatre pieces can be summarized as follows:

1. Choose an appropriate form to reveal the content.

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[1]Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form, A Theory of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 40.

[2]Ibid., p. 28.

[3]H. Grady Davis, Design for Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 4.

[4]Samuel Beckett as quoted in Alexander Dean and Lawrence Carra (eds.) Fundamentals of Play Directing (San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), p. 12.

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a. Consider non-verbal communication--symbols, action and movement, as well as verbal communication.
b. Consider irony and humor as a means of communication.
c. Select forms which reveal content with clarity and power.
d. Select forms which point beyond themselves to a deeper meaning.

2. Choose forms which help reveal ancient messages in a new way for our everyday existence.
3. Consider the historical and social context and the persons to whom it will be addressed.

In addition to these guidelines based on Old Testament prophecy, the creators also need to feel comfortable in the medium they are using, so that they can get beyond technique to communication.

While this project emphasizes artistic expressions, this is only one of the many ways to express Scriptural interpretations. We respond and express interpretations through social action, through the actions of our daily lives, and through whatever dimensions our lives include; in the Body of Christ we each express our faith and interpretation according to our own ability--some as puppeteers and dramatists, others as lobbyists, revolutionaries, writers, teachers, etc.

The artistic forms we chose articulated our ideas and feelings about the text; form and content became one; the process and product were inseparable. Images bubbled out from the text and from our imagination. We brainstormed ideas about patterns of movement, insights, sounds, smells, tastes, images, and rhythm. They took the shape of Holy Theatre, masks, puppets, ritual, pageantry, symbolic props, music, costumes, set, and technical developments.

This chapter examines the major art forms we chose to interpret

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Esther: Holy Theatre, puppets, masks, and ritual modes. These forms will be analyzed according to the guidelines for puppet theatre and drama outlined in Chapter 2. The chapter decribes these art forms, their roots, their relationships with each other, their purpose, and ways they are used. Examples of ways they functioned to serve the interpretation, "Esther," are given. Although this chapter focuses on artistic forms for the sake of explanation, in actuality the hermeneutical process can not be separated from the form. Some aspects of the inter-relationship between form and the hermeneutical process are illustrated in this chapter and other aspects are shown in Chapter 6.

Holy Theatre

Holy Theatre is defined by Peter Brook as "The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible; the notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can have a deep hold on our thoughts."[5] Holy Theatre is not necessarily pious or conscious of the scared. Holy Theatre is sacred, because it shows the condition of humanity--reflections of being:

> There are two ways of speaking about the human condition; there is the process of inspiration--by which all positive elements of life can be revealed and there is the process of honest vision; by which the artist bears witness to whatever it is he has seen. The first process depends on revelation; it can't be brought about by holy wishes. The second one depends on honesty and it mustn't be clouded over by holy wishes.[6]

We portrayed the characters with a mixture of joy and sadness, beauty and baseness, excess and deficiency. Feelings of fear moved into excesses of greed and brutality, not only in stereotypical characters

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[5]Peter Brook, The Empty Space (New York: Avon Books, 1968), p. 38.

[6]Ibid., p. 53.

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like Haman, but also in characters who represented who we were--Esther and Mordecai. The play mirrored oppression, exploitation, sexism, and violence. Nelle Morton names this representation of humanity "prophetic drama":

> The true prophet exposes the condition of the situation and the ambiguity of the human heart in such fashion that no one escapes. Every human motive, every human act, the prophetic drama would affirm, manifests in one way or another its own self-seeking and prejudice. Every order in time makes known its own relativity to the extent that judgement hangs over every nation under the sun.[7]

Because baseness and nobility are portrayed, the theatre allows us to sense the grace within us. It deters us from hiding or pretending and from being complacent or self-satisfied.[8] Hence, Holy Theatre is redemptive because it reminds us that no human is without sin or without grace.

Holy Theatre presupposes values, perchance values which have been destroyed, cast aside, or atrophied. Holy Theatre affirms that despite all the excesses--the greed, pompousness, and vanity--that life is at its foundation--sacred. Anything which de-humanizes life or opposes life is a sacrilege to life[9] and to the divine.[10] The theatre protests these dehumanizing forces by manifesting their horror. Our purpose becomes to stay awake, open ears, sharpening seeing, deepen sensitivity, and cry out "No" to all that destroys life. Any drama

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[7]Nelle Morton, "Drama of Social Protest," Social Action, 32, 4 (December 1965), p. 18.

[8]Samuel Beckett's plays are a good example of this.

[9]Bread and Puppet Theatre is an example of this. See page 30 and Appendix A.

[10]It depends on the theatre's author whether or not the emphasis of the sacred is on God or humanity. For the church, obviously, it is both the importance of all life and our concern for God's purposes.

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which increases the audience's awareness of the realities and complexities of the world and the human situation for each one of us calls for participation in life at a deeper, more radical level.[11] However, Holy Theatre should not propagandize, elicit pity, or force people to do this or that. Rather, Holy Theatre's purpose is to present the individual's or group's expression to the audience who in turn feel, respond, make decisions, and act.

Holy Theatre also portrays a hope, a power beyond that which destroys life. It manifests the deep currents beneath the surface of our lives where beauty is enshrined and where meaning lies, not by evoking nostalgia, but by unfolding a vision:

> The church is called to embrace drama that would expose consistently the condition to which the Gospel would articulate the hope. Yet inherent in the protest itself lies the beginning of the answer. For only that which <u>is</u> can make known that which <u>is not</u>. By this very drama the dramatist of social protest affirms that the question has been formulating for him and her even though he or she may not yet be able to name the Truth that called it into consciousness.[12]

It is because we have been given a vision of what life is to be that we cry, that we act, that we protest, that we hope.

We were responsible for finding patterns, rhythms, shapes, sounds, words, and silences which made the abstract concrete in our interpretation. We looked for forms and elements to penetrate deeper into the meaning. The whole play, the pictures, the tape, the narration of our creation, etc. show how we interpreted Esther into Holy Theatre, as the poem at the beginning of this thesis describes.

Our creation of Vashti's character also exemplifies the way we

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[11]Morton, p. 16.

[12]Ibid., p. 19.

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interpret Esther in the style of Holy Theatre. Our development of Vashti was a fascinating evolution of interdisciplinary hermeneutics. Our characterization began when we were reading the text and comparing its historical consequences with our own:

> Karen: One of the things which struck me--I thought it was real interesting the things which brought about the queen being thrown out. It was merely the fact that he (the king) wanted her to come in and she refused, and all of the ramifications that was going to have (reads: 1:17) "this deed of the queen will be made known to all women causing them to look with contempt upon their husbands." (Laughter)
> John: Yeah.
> Karen: I though that was real good.
> John: ....for a laugh.
> Karen: ....so it was this fear of the women rising up against men....and I thought this was interesting.[13]

We questioned why she refused to come to the king at the banquet. We suggested that participating in the king's banquet was like participating in a system which drank the blood of oppressed peoples:

> Karen: You know what I said earlier--the reason she refuses is because she doesn't want to drink, but here it sounds like she doesn't want to be exploited sexually. I want to be true to the story, but I also like the idea of not wanting to drink from the vat.
> Theresa: Well it can be both.
> Linda: Especially if it's the blood of other people that they're drinking--that implies an exploitation.
> Theresa: And it doesn't say explicitly--it says she has to wear a crown, but some people (scholars) have said that she's not supposed to wear anything else (laughter) which really emphasizes the exploitiveness of it.[14]

Subsequent discussion expanded the idea:

> John: This is not in the story; however as I read it, it suddenly occurred to me that Vashti ought to show up somewhere at the end. She's the only one when the king says "come" and she says, "bull shit" to the powers that be. She is the only one. Everyone else falls into the power structure....and if Vashti was just sitting at the end weeping for the people who had died.

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[13]"The Esther Project," February 23, 1978.

[14]Ibid.

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Theresa: Mmmmm (intrigued)
Karen: That's kind of nice.
John: (For) both Jews and Greeks.
Linda: I'm really in favor of that.
Theresa: Me, too.
Linda: It's the people who refuse to play the game.
Karen: Yeah, I like it a lot.[15]

We continued to evolve our image of Vashti. We considered portraying her with abstractions and metaphors such as mother earth. We contemplated shining different colors of light on a giant ball to reflect her moods and responses to violence. In the end we decided to portary Vashti as a woman. When she was still part of the king's court, she wore a jeweled mask and dazzling party clothes, but after she refused to participate in the violent system, she took off the mask to reveal her vulnerable, compassionate, and alive human face. Vashti was the only character besides Esther who revealed her human face. Her costumes added to the metaphor: she switched from elaborate party clothes to a simple blue dress. In her fall from power, her simple, true self was revealed with dignity.

We deliberated over forms to portray her refusal to participate in the violent system.

Karen: I think (it would be) more effective to have a verbal "no" throughout....
John: By saying "no" I don't necessarily mean a verbal "no."
Karen: I think it would make the "yes" at the end more powerful.
John: Yes.
Karen: Or have the chorus say "no" all together, Go; "no, no no, No, No NO NO NO NO!!" (Crescendo).
Theresa: Yes! I mean "no." (All laugh).[16]

Later we decided to portray this "no" symbolically with a bell and a song. Hunt composed a song for Vashti to begin and the chorus to join

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[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., February 29, 1978.

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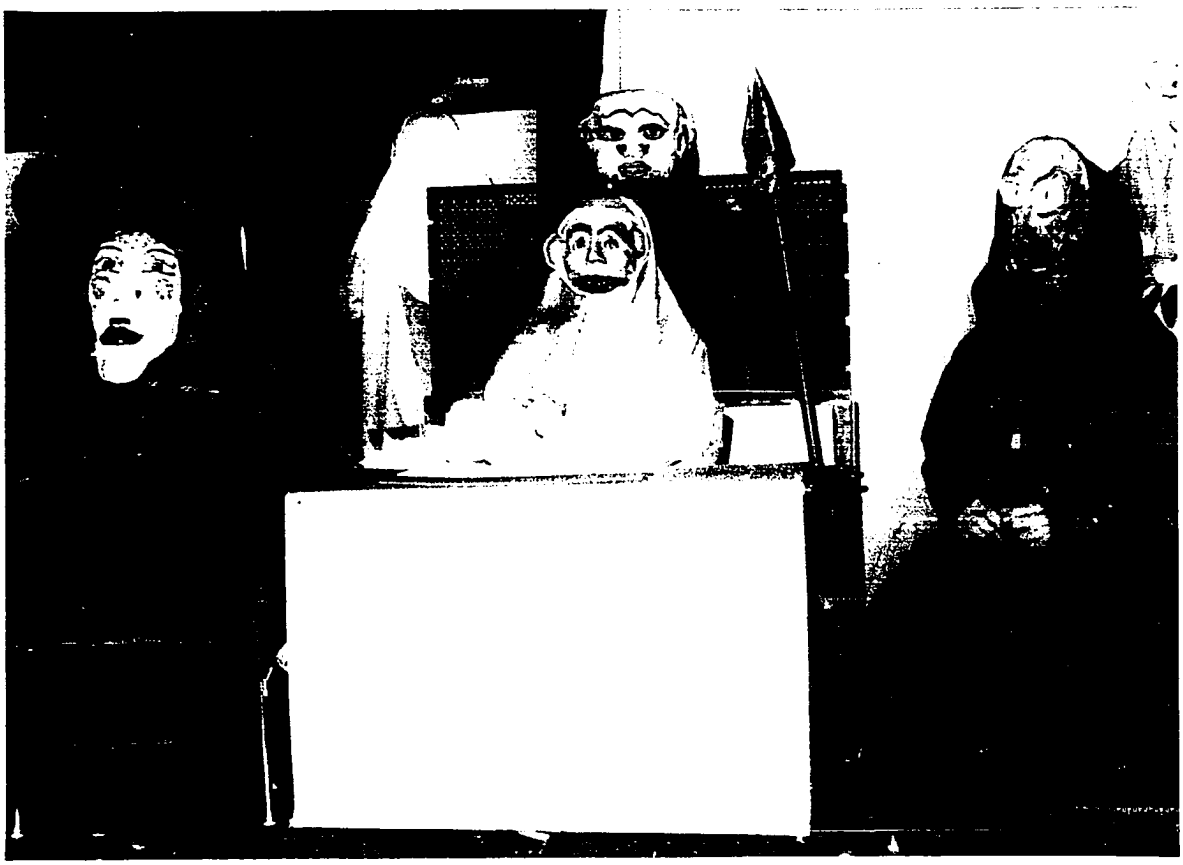

Vashti (played by Marguerite Terrell) sits on the left with King Ahasuerus and Haman, right, while chorus members prepare for the initial party. Since it is before Vashti's banishment from the king's court, she still has on her bejeweled mask.

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in singing. It symbolized to her "no" and the grief over the decree issued. Later Marguerite, who played Vashti, composed a poem to display her refusal and sang "Lord Have Mercy" at the other brutal events.

Vashi evolved into the major figure of our production. She alone saw the violence and oppression of the establishment and cried "no." She appeared at the hangings, at the dissemination of the decrees, and at the final violent slaughter. Vashti's presence became a symbol of judgement against violence and a symbol of dismay over the various "victories of the establishment." Vashti was the lone figure who called us to hear, called us to see, called us to feel, called us to look in the mirror to see who we really are:

Vashti, Vashti always there
at the hangings, the bloody scenes, the massacres.
Why do you toll the bells?

It's not jealousy that keeps you from celebrating.
Queen Esther and her court pay you no notice.
But your bearing tells us of a nobility of a different sort.
You toll the bells, sing the death song.
Your face feels the human pain.
Why? Why? Why don't they tear down the gallows?

You are the only one who
understands the real defeat.
Toll the bells. Cry loudly.
There is no difference between
those who wear the clothes.
Who has on the drum major's hat?
Is it Haman? Is it Mordecai?
Does it matter?
Neither the victor, only the killer,
now both, all, creators of the gallows.

Drink deeply, longly,
savor the taste. Mellow,
aged, ripe and ready as
blood to flow.
Be drunk on the victor's wine.

The gallows are yours.
Use it once. Why not twice?
It's so nice
and mellow and ripe and ready as blood to flow.

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You who made it;
why can't you take it down?
Vashti, why do they drink?
Toll the bell, Vashti.

What do you become
when you play the game?
What's so wrong with a parade?
Tra la di boom dia, tra la di boom dia....

But you say,
"We know not what we do!"
But, do they know not what they do?

They do the same,
they play the game,
join the parade.
They change the clothes and
enjoy the fruit of
the gallows.
Toll the bells, Vashti.[17]

We asked her questions because she disturbed us so. She was foolish according to the standards of her social system. Out of her passion for justice and her compassion for all people she refused to participate in her status quo. Like the Old Testament Prophets who dared to proclaim a message which unmasked brutality and violence, she became the character in our play who proclaimed the prophetic stance. And like the message of the prophets, if we who created her, and those who heard our message, took her radical message seriously, it would overturn the existing order. It would be revolutionary.

Three Forms Related to Holy Theatre

Puppetry, masks, and ritual are artistic forms connected with Holy Theatre. Each of their historical roots begins as an expression of the sacred. Ancient people faced hunting, food gathering, and the

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[17]Steve Dominguez from the "Esther" Program, "A Community Created Experimental Theatre Piece," May 1978.

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mysteries of life with rituals. Puppets and masks have a long, distinguished and interrelated history dating back to prehistoric tribal rituals.[18] Like ancient holymen and women, when actors use masks, puppets, and ritual, they use them to increase their own expressive power: the visual objects of the puppet or mask in motion point toward a deeper reality of the holy.

We originally chose to interpret a text with puppets because of the possibilities of this art, as I described in Chapter 3. Later as we listened to the text we decided to add masked actors. The choice of ritual evolved out of our discussion in interpreting, as I will describe.

Puppetry

"A puppet is an inanimate figure that is made to move by human effort before an audience."[19] Usually people think of puppets as imitations of persons or animals. However, puppets can also represent abstract forms, symbols, or any idea or value. There are many shapes, sizes, and styles, including shadow puppets, marionettes, hand puppets, larger than life puppets, and rod puppets. Puppets can also be any inanimate shape or form which a person animates to give character and brings to life for others. Hence, objects like spoons, hammers, handkerchiefs, etc. can become puppets. The term, puppet, can also refer to masked actors or actresses who present stereotypical actions

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[18]E. T. Kirby, "The Puppet Issue, An Introduction," Review (September 1972). Also see Bill Baird, The Art of the Puppet (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 30-40.

[19]Baird, p. 13.

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and expressions.[20]

Puppetry originated from prehistoric rituals and has been used throughout history for secular and religious expression. The art form shares with others--to entertain, to perform for an audience, to make a statement for a group, or to symbolize meaning for a congregation. Puppetry has the potential to communicate to persons of all ages and walks of life. Puppetry can enable us to share our feelings about life and express our own identity and society's identity. As such it becomes an art for and of the people.

Moving a puppet gives it expression. This is what makes puppets come alive. Sound can also aid the art. A puppeteer may move the figure to music or other sound or speak for the puppet. Other times a puppet may move in silence.

Puppetry at its best is an essence or an emphasis. It is like a mime with movement and manipulated figures. Puppetry can heighten meaning--sad is sadder, or simple is simpler. As metaphors or symbols puppets give vitality and power to a message. It can help us to freshly reinterpret the old stories for our own contexts.

Prophetic puppetry has been used to express social and political thoughts and to shake people out of satisfaciton and comfort. It can act as a mirror to ourselves and to the world to show us the truth as Chapter 2 indicates.

Sacred puppet theatre is a transparent form which points beyond

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[20]Bill Beeson, "The Holy Theatre - Peter Schumann and Jerzy Grotowski" (Davis, CA: 1979). In his paper he indicates that Grotowski asks actors to reject their ego and personal identity, and replace them with stereotypical actions, fixed gestures, positions, and rhythms. They became then--"Uber-Marionettes."

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itself to something deeper. As we discussed using puppetry in "Esther", we asked ourselves how it served each situation better than other art form and what advantage a puppet had over a human actor.

Puppets were symbolic in the parade for a new queen.

> Karen: I see Esther like Miss America--like with a swimming suit with a sash.
> John: Hey!
> Theresa: One thing that I saw with the parade of the women before the king (was)--doing that (beauty parade with) small figures.
> Karen: ....We only need one pattern, all of the same, maybe different colored swimming suits.
> Theresa: Except for Esther.
> John: ....Making Esther different.[21]

Making them all out of cardboard emphasized the stereotype even more so. They were exactly alike except for different colored swimsuits and hair. The Esther beauty pageant puppet also wore a swimsuit and sash, but she was three-dimensional to portray her uniqueness and well rounded character.

Our study of Haman also produced an image that was portrayed symbolically:

> Karen: Haman is big?
> Theresa: Maybe he could start out really small and when he gets (to be) prime minister he could grow.
> Ron: That's kind of nice. Different shoes--taller shoes every time he appears.[22]

This idea developed further when we were structuring Act II:

> Ron: We need to deal with the Haman problem (tell of his rise to power) in light of the mood we need (a change of pace).
> John: Have Haman dealt with by a narrator? Or you could do something like Haman is exalted and do the whole thing in pantomine and have the puppets bow--everything on stage bow (laughter) except Mordecai.
> Ron: ....a neutral narration as a little image of Haman goes across like this, a slightly larger image of Haman goes across

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[21]"The Esther Project," March 6, 1978.

[22]Ibid., March 2, 1978.

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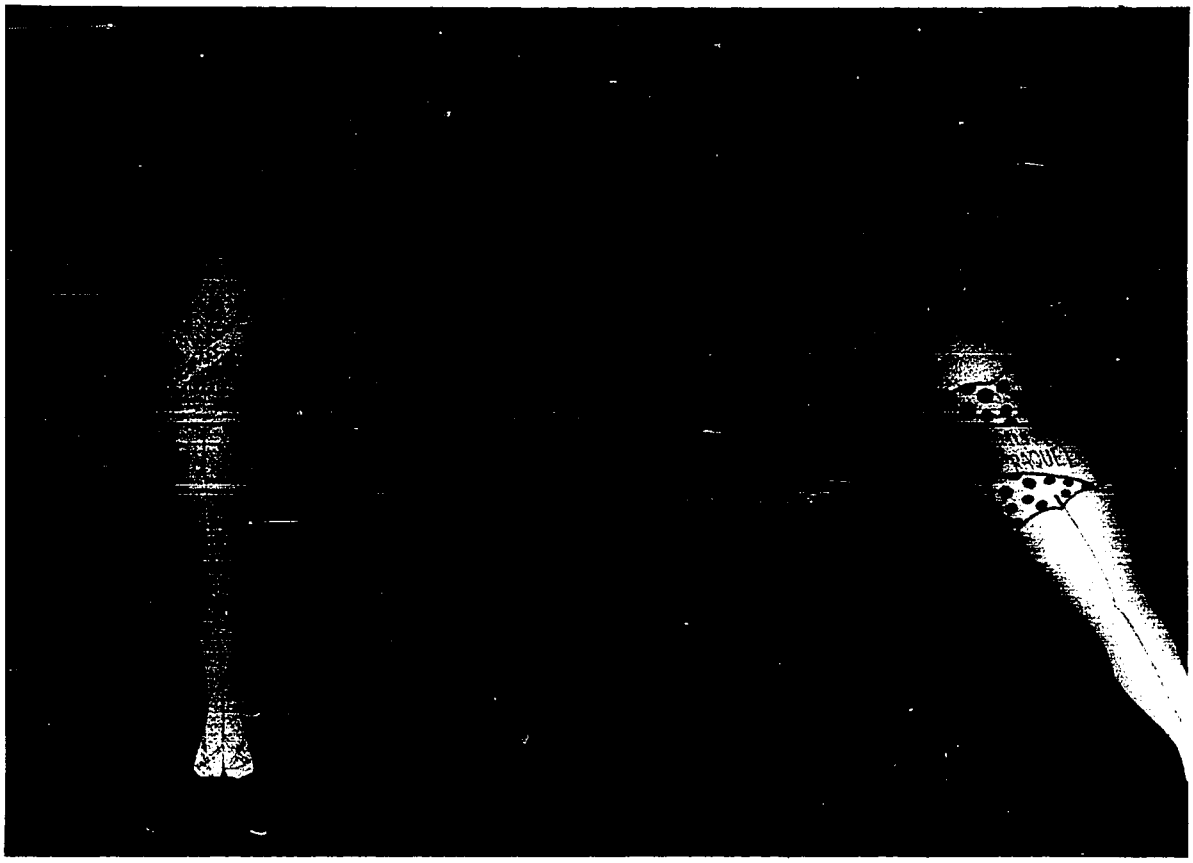

Top - cardboard beauty pageant puppets parade across the puppet stage.

Left - Jeff Inlow holds crowd puppet he had helped make.

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like this with the same costume we've seen before with a little narration about Haman, the prime advisor who grew in the king's eyes and power in the king's court.

Theresa: Mmmmmm.

John: Ahhhh.

Sue: Oooh.

Ron: And who expected and got exultation from all the land? And finally we get the real Haman walking across with Mordecai walking behind and stopping when we notice that Mordecai isn't bowing.

John: And everyone could be accompanied by little ones bowing and then when you get to the place where Mordecai doesn't bow, you could have gotten the impression that each time Haman goes across there is a bowing.[23]

Later we added a fourth giant size Haman, with a giant mask and stilts, to characterize his growth in power. Here, the growing images became a visual pun.

The little ones bowing to Haman were represented by crowd puppets. A crowd puppet is composed of a group of figures which designates a crowd. The individual figures in the crowd usually do not move separately. Each chorus member carried a stick with five or six simple figures on it. Half of them were the size of the smallest Haman puppet and the other half were the size of the three-foot Haman. We used crowd puppets to expand the image that Haman wanted all people to pay him obeisance. Furthermore, crowd puppets, all alike on a stick, emphasized: It isn't important <u>who</u> bows; what is important is <u>who doesn't</u> bow--Mordecai.

In each of these cases puppets illustrated simple visual metaphors. Beauty pageant puppets and Haman puppets represented significant characters in the play's plot. The crowd puppets on the other hand simply emphasized the action.

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[23]Ibid., April 13, 1978.

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Masks

Masks are coverings which go on the face, top of the head, and/or body, which can have highly expressive power. Masks are in a sense moving sculptures--visual interpretations which walk around. They have a wide variety of functions:

> ....the mask has been used in a multitude of capacities including disguise, festivity and celebration, protection, as a medium for attempted communication with the spirits and the supernatural, as a device of superstition and transformation, for supposed curative or healing effects, in drama and theater, for religious or ritual purposes: to frighten, to appease, to case evil, to influence the natural phenomena, and to contact the dead.[24]

Masks function in four primary ways according to Ronald Grimes.[25] The first type of mask is a fixed form or "concretion."[26] Historically in religious rituals, the fixed outer form made the intangible concrete and powerful. The masks took on a magical nature for people. Many of these were masks of the dead; others were masks of non-human beings. These concretion masks were used by holy men and women for ancestor worship, funerals and fertility rites. An individual wearing the mask took on the spirit or character it represented and his or her own personality was erased. A stereotypical or stock character in a play can also be a concretion. Historical examples are Harlequin, Punch, and the masked characters in the commedia. Concretions reduced characters to one dimension. They became so familiar to the audience

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[24]Norman Laliberte and Alex Mogelon, Masks, Face Coverings and Head Gear (Cincinnati: Von Nostrand Reinhold, 1973), p. 69.

[25]Ronald G. Grimes, "Masking: Toward a Phenomenology of Exteriorization," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 43, 3 (September 1975).

[26]Ibid., p. 509-511. Grimes terms this masking "concretion."

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that their actions were predictable.

A second form of mask is masking as concealment or disguise.[27] In Halloween masks and Mardi Gras masks, role denial or inversion of role is more important that what the particular mask represents. A second type of disguise uses the otherness generated by the mask for secret societies or social control. Such a disguise suggests that reality is hidden deep behind the eyeholes. These mask wearers maintain an anonymity for law enforcement (such as the Lone Ranger) or for law breaking (such as the Ku Klux Klan). Either way what they gain in power, they lose in personhood.

A third form of masking is essentially unmasking, or as Ron Grimes calls it--"Embodiment."[28] The person removes or breaks his or her mask. Embodiment liberates the self from the exterior demands of roles. There is no distinction between the wearer and the thing worn. Spontaneity and naturalness typify the actions of embodiment.

The final form of mask is "Masking as Expression."[29] No longer does the mask control the wearer as in the fixed form; no longer do the wearers hide behind it as disguise; and no longer do they pretend that people can be maskless. Instead, they are aware that we use masks to communicate; they take responsibility for the mask to wear it so the individual, society, and the divine can be seen through it, but not identified with it.[30]

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[27]Ibid., p. 511-513. He calls this masking "concealment."

[28]Ibid., p. 513-515.

[29]Ibid., p. 515-516.

[30]Ibid., p. 516.

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Actors who use masks can operate on any of these levels: (1) They can allow the fixed form to control them; (2) they can simply use it to disguise themselves on stage; (3) they can unmask or deny their use of the mask; (4) they can use the mask for expressing power. When actors wear masks, any tilt of the head or nod exaggerates the expression. Masks help create a psychic distance for the audience. Persons no longer see their friend or relative on stage, but they see a visual image walking around which emphasizes a deeper meaning. As expression, actors can use masks for symbolic role playing. But they can also go beyond symbol to allow masks to become transformational. This is like acting with someone else's eyes to see everything in a new way. When this transformational experience occurs, the expression becomes most powerful.

We used masks in the play, "Esther," for symbolic meaning. They were used as visual puns and metaphoric imagery to bring the story alive. The actors and actresses who wore them were not controlled by the masks, or simply wearing them as disguise, but used them to extend expressive power, the fourth category from Ron Grimes (Masking as Expression).

The masks played an important role in developing the characters. The mask each person sculptured was an interpretation, not an imitation. More interpretation occurred when we painted them different colors (green, red, yellow, blue). Sue, for instance, painted the messenger's face red, white and blue and added the insignia, "femail."

The masks of the chorus members were examples of Masking as Concretion. They had a similarity about them even though they all had different expressions and were painted different colors. For one thing,

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Theresa Mason mixes powdered Lincoln clay with water to make clay.

Sharon Hunefeld paints a mask.

Sue Lemly papier mache's a mask she has sculptured.

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each had a fixed expression; they could not change their smirk or frown. They were all larger than a human head (about 12 inches in diameter) which dwarfted the actors' bodies and made them seem more child-like. The chorus members said little and played stereotypical roles such as messenger or servant. They changed their role as it was needed to fit the action of the play. Similar simple costumes helped them to maintain a background role. The combination of lack of character development and fixed facial expression made the chorus members wearing the masks seem more like human puppets.

The masks of the central characters played a more significant role in their specific characterizations. I have already described that what the character Vashti did was unmasking (Masking as Embodiment) which liberated her from the role the exterior situation demanded. Another example of a central character whose mask played a central role is Esther. We decided to have Esther bare-faced and simply costumed in the beginning. This natural form of masking (Masking as Embodiment) helped portary her as someone with whom we could identify. Then we considered adding her mask piece by piece as she joined the court system. We decided to make only one mask which the eunuch gave her as a beauty queen, because we knew the importance of the mask in getting to the king's heart. Rita sculpted Esther's mask with very delicate features, painted it white with pink cheeks and red lips like a china doll and adorned it with dazzling jewels. As she took this mask, it functioned for her as Masking as Disguise. Wearing the mask showed a degree of self-consciousness about her culturally defined role. But, as in the case of Masking as Concealment, what she gained in power, she lost in personhood.

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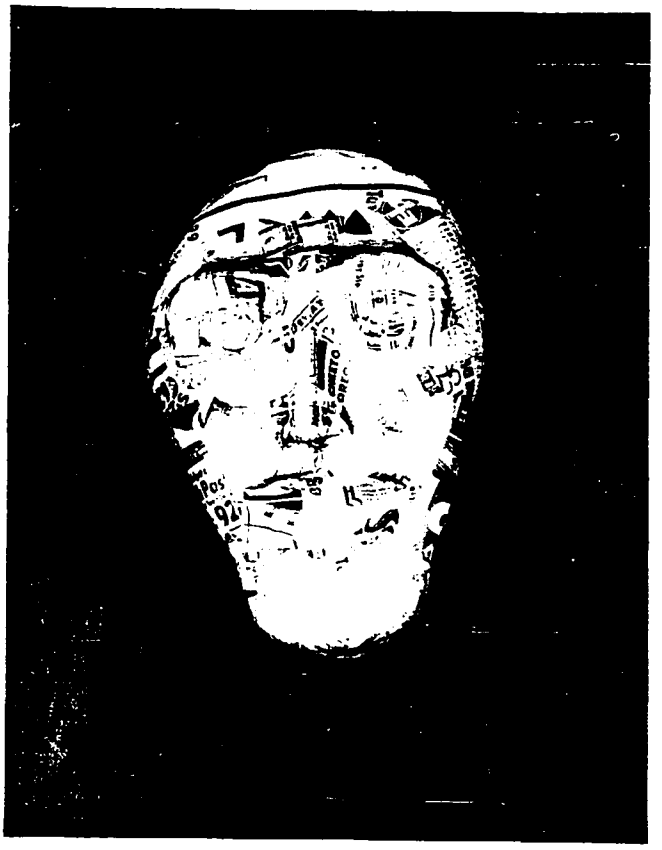

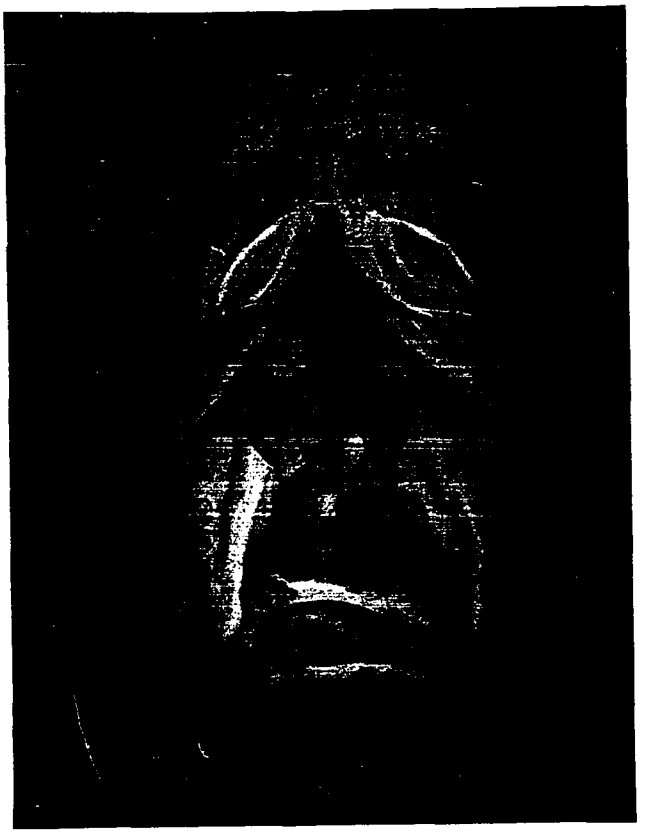

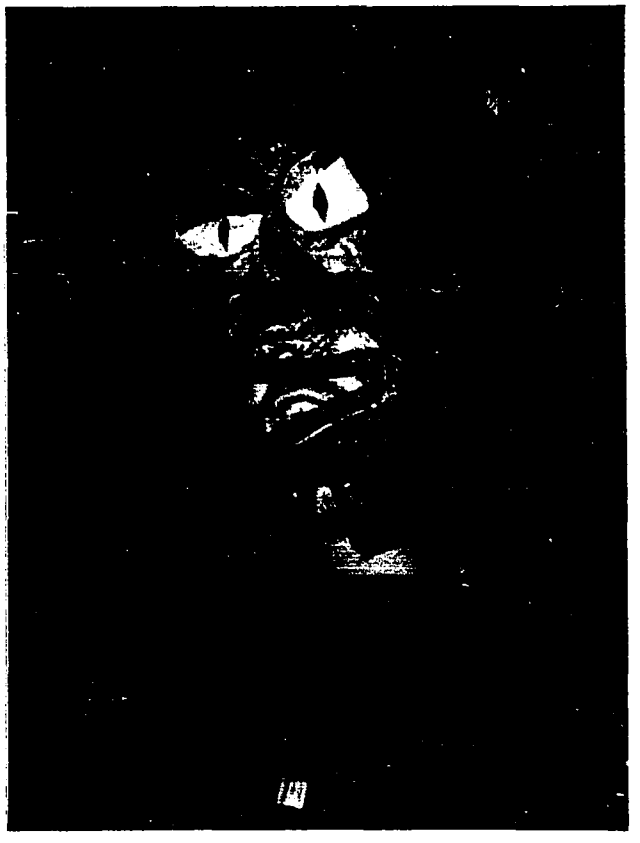

Masks in three stages: upper left, papier mache; upper right, painted with an undercoat; and left, finished Haman mask.

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Ritual Modes

Often ritual is defined in a specific or normative way which applies it to specific religious traditions. However, there are many different definitions of ritual, some of which apply to animals as well as humans. "Ritualization" is a term used to designate stylized, repeated gesturing and posturing of animals and humans which has no obvious adaptive or pragmatic function such as getting food.[31] For both animals and humans in ritualized action, communication is more important than function. Margaret Mead describes ritual as patterns of human behavior performed with extra intensity for special occasions.[32] Rituals which act out the most basic ritualization are the ones which are rooted in the rhythms of life, death, and nature, presupposing an interaction between humans and their bodies, relationships, or physical environment. We can understand ritual better by considering our changing history, the changing seasons, and the turning points in human life.

Ritual is composed of the most basic rhythms: coming together, pushing apart, intimacy and aggression, symbiosis and isolation.[33]

> Ritualization includes the patterned and the random, the repeated and the idosyncratic, the routine and the nonpragmatic, the habitual and the useless elements of action and interaction.[34]

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[31]Ronald Grimes, "Mode of Ritual Necessity," Worship, 53, 2 (1979), p. 126.

[32]Margaret Mead, "Ritual and Social Crisis," in James D. Schaughnessy (ed.) The Roots of Ritual (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 89.

[33]Grimes, "Mode of Ritual Necessity," p. 129.

[34]Ibid.

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Rituals are composed of symbolic acts. Victor Turner proposes three categories of ritual symbolism. First of all, each culture has basic elementary symbols which occur in rites. Secondly, each symbol refers to a wide spectrum of things. They are often diverse and ambiguous, which can help mediate contrasting elements. In the third place, the particular meaning of a symbol in a rite depends on what is refers to.[35] Like Holy theatre, through the language of symbolic acts, ritual seeks to make the invisible visible.

Ritual modes--decorum, ceremony, liturgy and celebration are rooted in ritualization.[36] Decorum is based on the civic and social life of a group. Ritual decorum shows courteous formalization and stylization.[37] Decorum displays roles, status intentions and creates rules for human interaction. Conventionalized behaviors and expectations such as etiquette or greetings are forms of decorum. Ceremony is a ritual based on a larger group interaction than decorum.[38] It symbolizes respect for power, government, histories and causes. Demonstrations, independence celebrations and saluting the flag are ritual ceremonies. Liturgical rituals, like other ritual modes, communicate and proclaim. The word "liturgy" means action of the people, and in liturgy people act out their religious understandings. Liturgies re-present events and remind persons of their religious identity. Liturgical rituals also celebrate the rhythms of life,

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[35]Christopher Crocker, "Ritual and the Development of Social Structure: Liminality and Inversion," in Schanghnessy, p. 65-66.

[36]Grimes, "Modes of Ritual Necessity," p. 126.

[37]Ibid., p. 131.

[38]Ibid., p. 133-134.

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death, and nature. Another form of ritual is celebration. Celebration is a mode of embracing the present which draws the future and past into itself. Festive occasions spring out of the events which are occurring or are being commemorated. Playing, partying, dancing, singing, making music, and pretending are forms of celebration.

Many dramatic forms are also associated with ritual. Momerie, pageantry, and masques are associated with times of ritual and had their origins in ritual. These three forms which flourished in the Middle Ages and Renaissance also used masks.

In momerie, masked persons, called mummers, processed, danced, and paraded in the streets and sometimes entered their neighbors' houses to silently play dice during agricultural festivals and other feast days.[39] They performed to promote growth of vegetation and general well-being of families and community and wore masks to get in touch with the spirits of beings their masks represented (Masking as Concretion). The mummers' revels abounded in buffoonery and lawlessness also, using their masks as disguise. The momerie continued to act in a ritualistic manner over the basic ritualization concerns of nature and biological life. The playfulness and festivity of the momerie was also a form of ritual as celebration.

Pageants are closely related to the momerie. "Pageant" comes from the Latin word "pagin" meaning plank. It was applied in the first place to the wheeled stage or religious plays in the Middle Ages and then to fixed stages in towns during civic shows and finally to the

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[39]Enid Welsford, The Court Masque (New York: Russel and Russel, 1962), p. 4.

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play, show, or procession.[40] There are two basic types of pageants. The first consist of a procession with no dialogues. In the 16th century, the pageant was a masquerade which paraded at Carnival time, May Day, and other festivals.[41] Masquers processed on foot or they went in vehicles. This was the precurser to our modern-day parade with floats, bands, and marchers. A second type of pageantry is performed in a stationary setting with processions, dances and songs interwoven with a series of dramatic episodes or miniature one-act plays.[42] In the Medieval and Renaissance pageants, persons primarily wore the mask as disguise. Pageantry maintains some connections with forgotten ancient rituals. Pageants contain elements of ritualization in their connection to the environment, ceremony--especially in civic pagentry, and celebration.

The masque developed from the momerie, pageant, dances and other peasants' rites observing the seasons. The masque which flourished from 1500 to 1650 developed into a more complex form than the momerie, especially at the artist's hand of Ben Johnson.[43] The English masque included the following elements: (1) an introductory song and dialogue, which sometimes was a kind of prologue with narration, (2) entry of masquers--persons in mask, (3) masque dances among noble masquers, (4) revels which in this case where ordinary ballroom dancing between

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[40]Welsford, p. 47.

[41]Ibid., p. 94.

[42]Esther Willard Bates and William Orr, Pageants and Pageantry (Chicago: Ginn, 1912), p. 38.

[43]Jack Coogan, "Ben Johnson and the Jacobean Masque," (Claremont, CA: January 6, 1064), p. 6ff.

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masquers and audience, (5) a final song and dialogue recalling masquers to the scene and concluding with a silent story and dramatic actions. Later, anti-masques were added. Masques were idealistic, portraying beauty, social harmony of personal and political affairs to help people escape reality; anti-masques portrayed grotesqueness, buffoonery and fun spectacles. Masques were usually performed for royalty and the upperclass and flattered those in power.[44] Occasionally, however, they were used as satire. Ben Johnson's "Comedy of Humours," for example, lashed out at vices of his time.[45]

Masques and pageants were frequently inserted into Elizabethan tragedies.[45] A sudden change from the light frivolity of masking deepened the horror even when the action of the masque or pageant did not actually bring about the catastrophe; it brought a stifling atmosphere of intrigue and corruption through juxtaposition and was a favorite tragic mofit.

The masques used masks for purposes of disguise. Some of the symbolic drama may have also used them for expression. Masques like their precursers had ritual modes and connections within them, as Enid Welsford notes:

> From the beginning to the end of its history, the essence of the masque was the arrival of certain persons visored and disguised to dance a dance or present an offering. This brings us very close indeed to ancients and almost world-wide ritual.[47]

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[44]Welsford, p. 397.

[45]Ibid., p. 388.

[46]Ibid., p. 284.

[47]Ibid., p. 3.

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"The Esther Project" used ritual modes in ways similar to the momeries, pageantry and masques. In drama, ritual expresses moments of high emotional intensity. A feeling or idea is emphasized by simplifying it or elaborating it. An example of how we created ritualized action evolved through our discussion about developing Act I.

Linda: This idea of sort of a parade of entertainment and every item of it blinds people and makes them more gaudy or whatever.
Ron: I would like to reverse your wording: Instead of a parade of entertainment, what is coming to me strongly is that the party itself is a parade that doesn't stop. Nothing can stop that parade.
John: Hmmmmm.
Ron: And it moves out of the chancel area of the sanctuary and into the narthex--maybe 3 times and while it's out we still hear it. It's still going on and things happen that amplify it the next time it comes around.
John: Ahaa.
Theresa: Mmmmm (both interested).
Ron: But they happen right in front of us and them amplify it again next time it comes around, but it doesn't stop.[48]

We decided three parades portrayed the essential action. All three parades were a ceremonious form of ritual mode. The first festive parade celebrated the party and honored the king. As the parade exited, Mordecai discovered a plot on the king's life, and as they returned, the messenger ran after the king to report that assasination plot. The second parade erupted from the riotous outburst to hang the plotters. Vashti refused to join the parade, which led to her banishment.

Linda: So now there's a new order. Do they say: Now let's go out and seek a new queen? Is it an excuse to begin the new parade?
Ron: And what needs to take place while they're gone?
Linda: A build-up of choosing.
John: If they choose while they're gone, the whole ending can be a build-up for the new queen.[49]

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[48]"The Esther Project", March 16, 1978.

[49]Ibid.

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In the last part of the third parade, the chorus members brought in the beauty pageant cardboard puppets that were the contestants for the new queen. It ended with the choice of Esther as the queen.

"Esther," like the momerie, pageantry and masque, used masked players and parades. The rowdy boisterous parades in Act I were similar to the parades of mummers who lept, danced, and reveled in buffoonery. "Esther" used narration and poetry to complement the parades, as did the masques. However, the structure of our play was not like the structure of the masques. Act I enacted pageantry at its fullest--with parades, dramatic interludes, music, action, sound, and high energy and intensity. The juxtaposition of spontaneous parades with tragic events, such as hangings, heightened the tragedy, like the use of masques within Elizabethan drama.

In "Esther" we used symbolic images and acts and various ritual modes. Like ritualization, the play contained some actions which were rooted in the rhythms of life and death. Esther's long walk to the king to save her life and the life of her people (see page 110, 112, and 155) and the ritualized sword fight in the closing scene, which symbolized death and violence, were examples of this type. Decorum functioned within the dialogue and action of the play to support the major action. For example, Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman was a breach of proper decorum according to Haman. The play's celebrations were distorted with a desire for power and violence; there they functioned, like the parades, to emphasize the horror. The primary mode of ritual within "Esther" was ceremony, but unlike the masques which flattered the court, our play caricatured the court in a satirical fashion.

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Conclusion

The artistic forms we chose need to be evaluated according to the guidelines for developing puppetry and theatre pieces based on forms used by Old Testament prophets.[50] The first guideline calls for an appropriate form to reveal the content. One of the major strengths of "The Esther Project" was that it chose a form for interpretation which was appropriate. Those who studied and interpreted Esther recognized the fine literary quality of the book. The artistic elements we chose maintained the artistic character of the original. "The Esther Project" did not insist on translating art into doctrine or dogma but desired to translate from one form of art to another.[51] As Guideline 1a suggests, we used both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication--symbols, action and movement. Guideline 1b suggests that irony and humor can help communicate. We used visual puns to communicate symbolic meaning. Some of our interpretation provided a way we could laugh at ourselves. More examples of our use of humor are described in the next chapter. Guideline 1c calls for forms which reveal the content with clarity and power. The function and purpose of masks, ritual, puppetry and holy theatre are to give power to expression. However, some of the interpretations may have been too blatant, which made them lose power. We worked diligently to communicate clearly through our symbols, make clear transitions, etc., but some of the symbolism and interpretation may have been obtuse. One problem with our corporate hermeneutic was

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[50]See page 61 and 62 for summary of these guidelines on forms used by Old Testament Prophets which Chapter 2 describes.

[51]John Linscheid, "Hermeneutics and the Esther Project" (Elkhart, IN: 1979), p. 12.

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that we had such a great time discussing it and enjoying our inuendos that our final creation contained some of those inuendos which were "in-house," and we had not clearly defined them for others. Guideline 1d calls for forms which point beyond themselves to a deeper meaning. Holy theatre, masks, puppetry and ritual each have the ability to point to a deeper reality. They helped us make the ideas and feelings we had about the story become concrete.

Guideline 2 calls for forms which help reveal the old message in a new way. The surprise elements in seeing a carnival-like approach to Biblical interpretation in the church and the various art forms created new images for the meaning of Esther. However, not many people in the church were familiar with the original story. Perhaps we should have advised them to read and study the ancient tradition, Esther, before coming to see the play's interpretation.

Guideline 3 affirms the need for persons to consider the current historical and social context and the audience. Although some of the artistic forms we chose are seldom used for dramatic Biblical interpretation, I think the artistic forms communicated with the audience. As we created, we often considered the contemporary context, as Chapter 4, 6, and 7 indicate. These chapters present more details and further evaluation of "The Esther Project's" consideration of context and audience. The final suggestion says persons should choose mediums in which they feel comfortable in order to get beyond technique to communicate. Some of us were fairly comfortable with the forms we chose. Others, however, had little or no experience making masks or puppets, and many had never acted with masks. This led people to focus more energy on learning new methods instead of focusing on the content,

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but it also provided opportunities for people to learn and enjoy new art forms.

The major weakness with our artistic forms was that our interpretation was overly cluttered. More selectivity in choosing symbols and art forms could have made the message clearer, easier to understand, and more powerful. However, I think the play, as it was created, used valid art forms for interpreting the tradition and helped us to communicate our interpretation.

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Chapter 6

CREATING "ESTHER" THROUGH AN INTERDISCIPLINARY HERMENEUTIC

Introduction

Most of the time we fragment our learning into different disciplines. In fact, most of our lives are fragmented--mind separated from body, words from non-verbal modes, rational thought from intuition, and work from theory. In the creation of our play, we sought to integrate theory and praxis, theology and artistic expression, and form and content. Walter Wink comments on this interdisciplinary style of hermeneutics:

> Here also a recovery of the revelatory function of art becomes crucial. Through the medium of clay, paints, written dialogue, music, movement, silence or role-playing, the echo of a feeling, which gives birth to an insight and is evoked by resonsance with the text, can be given further body and substance. Insight and feeling coalesce in a story we are striving to tell. When it becomes our story--that is, when feeling and insight merge in the symbolic matrix of our being--then the insight furthers the self-formative process.[1]

Using a combination of Biblical study, theologizing, political discussion, sculpture, improvisation, and other disciplines made the text incarnate for us.

This chapter continues the narration of our hermeneutics focusing on the interdisciplinary approach which we created. The description of our character formation of King Ahasuerus in the first part of this chapter illustrates that we intertwined methods at each

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[1]Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 63.

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level of study. The rest of the chapter shows the role of specific procedures in the total interpretation.

Characterization of King Ahasuerus

We explored each major character through Biblical inquiry and imaginative interpretation. Initially we brainstormed our impressions of each character:

> Karen: It sounds at the beginning, like this Kingdom is really expansive--in the days of Aha[2] who reigned from India to Ethiopia....
> Theresa: Oh it is; it's a huge territory.
> Karen: Over 127 provinces--that's a lot. I think this king was sure dumb to be in charge of so much territory and so I'm wondering how this power gets spread out.[3]

We noted that King Ahasuerus never made any decisions of his own; he seemed to be entirely dependent upon others' advice. When our research told us his historical name might have been King Xerxes I,[4] the following portrait was painted:

> Steve: Why was the symbol "xerox" decided on?
> Linda: For King Xerxes--and just the idea that it fits this uncontrollable idiot machine that keeps going, going, going.
> Steve: The association of copies--does that interfere?
> Theresa: Rather than his own ideas, he gives out what is put in the machine to copy from Haman or from Esther; his own power is kind of a false power.
> John: (Gives examples from the Bible.)
> Linda: Someone pushes the button.
> Karen: (In a high, funny voice imitating the king) Oh good! I need help--prepare to produce--are you done with that decree? (Laughter from the group.)
> Steve: Eeeeenah, eeeeeup. (Making machine sounds.)[5]

---

[2]King Aha and Aha were nicknames we used for King Ahasuerus.

[3]"The Esther Project," February 17, 1978.

[4]Other sources say he was probably King Artaxerxes I, if he was an historical figure.

[5]"The Esther Project," February 27, 1978.

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We depicted him through visual interpretation. In a session with discussion and movement, we had a roll of newsprint stretched across the floor with paint brushes, paint, crayons, and magic markers. Some sketched ideas at the beginning of the session, while others intermittently grabbed a crayon, as an idea popped into their heads. We sketched him as a funny little fellow with big ears.

After Steve reviewed background Biblical notes on each character, we tried different movement patterns to portray the characters:

> Ron: Do we have an idea yet, a pattern?
> Karen: I suggest a press.
> Steve: Well, the thing with Aha is he never does anything original. It's always what other people do at him, through him, and all the rest of the stuff. Any movement he makes has to be sort of purposeless.[6]

As Steve reads a scene, John and Bruce moved silently experimenting with different patterns. Then they tried adding dialogue with the movement. Ron encouraged them to emphasize the differences between the characters with four well-chosen classic movements. Then the whole group explored the character of King Ahasuerus simultaneously. We bounced and flapped, jerked and punched the space around us; we whooped and croaked, sputtered and twittered. Then we all roared with laughter and shared our outrageous caricatures.

The movement, improvisation and visual interpretation lit a flame to our imaginations. We combined our visual interpetation and our xerox-like mechanical depiction with our improvisation. However, we did not envision the king completely machine-like. Further drawings and discussion created an image of a large throne-like structure which was

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[6]Ibid.

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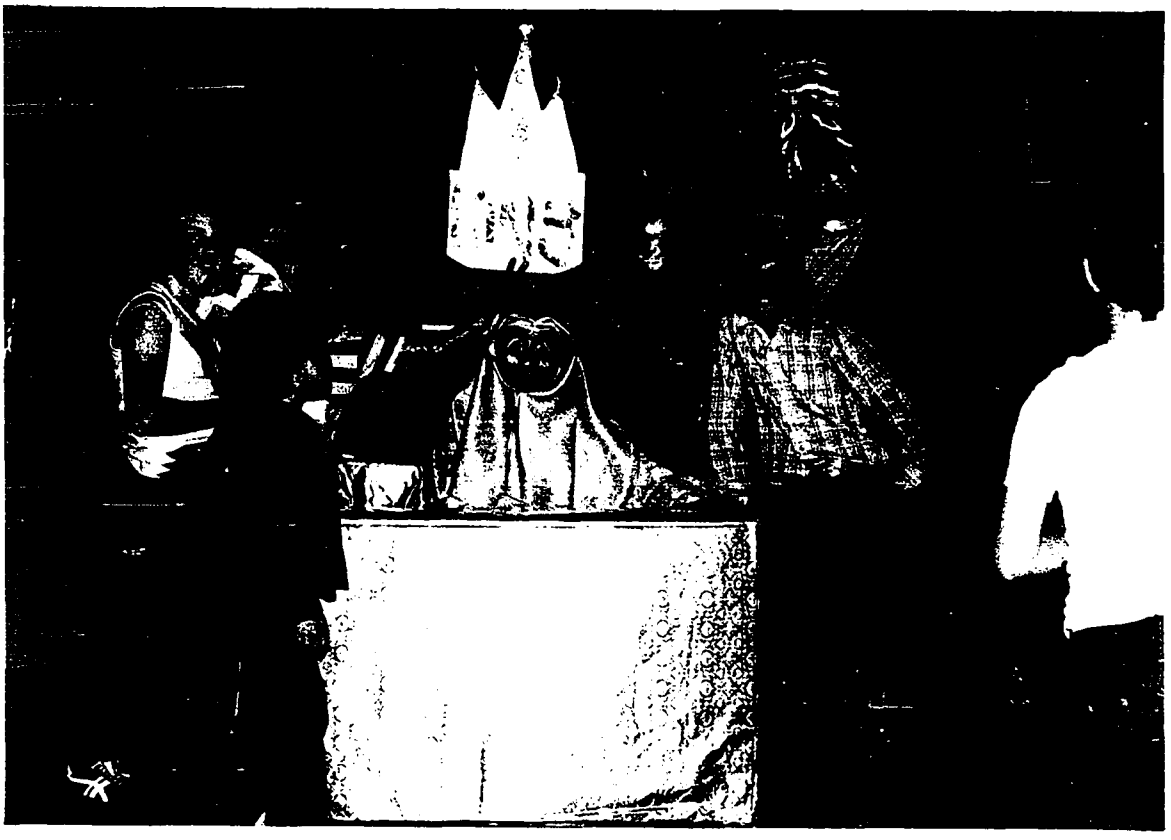

King Ahsuerus (played by John Linscheid) is surrounded by youth from the audience, while Hatach, (Sue Lemly) looks on.

The king's costume, the throne front, and the sign saying 'KING' are gold metallic. The back of the throne and King Ahasuerus' lips, eyes and eyebrows are purple.

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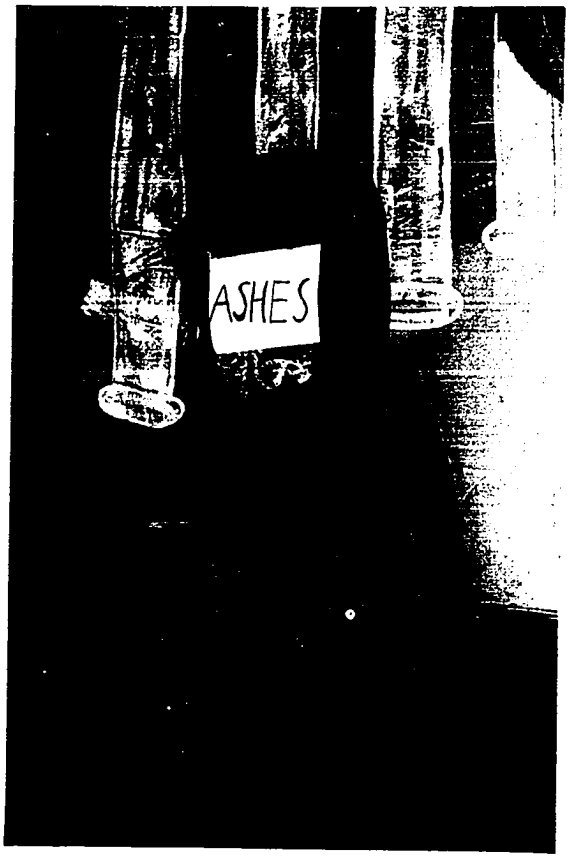

Paul Schurman, as Mordecai, wears his regular costume and mask plus a black hood, sackcloth and ashes to symbolize mourning for the decree against the Jews.

Bruce Epperly, Katie Gould, Toni Bynum and Lisa Devitt wear simple costumes designed for chorus members.

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when she was chosen queen, she added her mask with an ornate veil, but still wore the simple dress. By Act II, when she had become part of the court, she was decked out in a gold metallic belly dancer's bikini and Persian pajamas with a shiny blue cape. Rings adorned her fingers and jewels decorated her neck. Rita added a metallic purple and gold robe to wear for her forbidden entrance to see the king. Subsequently, she wore this costume that matched the king's gold metallic and purple throne, costume and face.

The chorus' simple frocks and sashes added to their simple background role, whose main function was to enhance the main characters and the action of the play.

Interpretation through the Set

The basic set design was a fairly literal, but simplified translation of the description of the king's court found in Esther. The main backdrop had three curtains which could be pulled; a plain yellow one stood for the king's outer court; a purple one with white columns represented the inner court; and a third red sheet with black and orange terror-haunted figures abstractly interpreted the mood of the Jews' revenge. The king's gate stood at stage left and a large simple puppet stage was on stage right. In addition to the stage area, the sanctuary offered space where the actors were able to move from the stage to the aisles and to the balcony.

Some of our ideas for creating the set emerged from our discussions about the gallows. We sketched drawings and let our imaginations go wild. At first we imaged the gallows like a wringer washing machine cranking people out so that they came out flat with all

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differences rung out of them. Since this image was confusing, we changed to a design of a simple, regular gallows which would grow larger with each violent action. We plotted the logistic techniques for hanging the eunuches, Haman and his ten sons.

The final set did not have a gallows, because the theatre crew did not have time to construct one. The set looked good, however, and was created in harmony with the overall interpretation. The dialogue, narration and sounds within the play helped to portray the gallows and the following was written in the program given to the audience:

> The gallows plays a dual function in the play. Of course persons are "hung" on it--as in killed. But interestingly, we also find celebration resulting from the gallows--as in victory, defeat of enemy. After every killing, our heros celebrate. They "live it up" and this includes plenty of drinking of the fruit of the vine.
>
> Vashti understands the gallows as a symbol of death and destruction. The drinking really symbolizes the human blood which is spilled so a few people at the top can compete for honors.
>
> The Jews, represented by Esther and Mordecai, begin the play as oppressed people, under the sentence of the gallows. Through their cunning, they are liberated! But what is the nature of liberation? The gallows, now under their mighty power, is used twice as much as before. Liberated, the Jews set about celebrating their victory by holding high the chalice of warm human blood. They, too, drink. And the gallows remain.[7]

Props As Symbolic Interpretation

While some props were typical props to aid the action of the characters in the play, others played a more explicit role in our interpretation. The stick horses added to our interpretation of the action issuing the decree by lending humor in juxtaposition to horror and sadness--"laughter so we can more easily accept the pain." We used

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[7]Steve Domiguez, from the Program, "A Community Created Experimental Theatre Piece" (Claremont, CA: May 1978).

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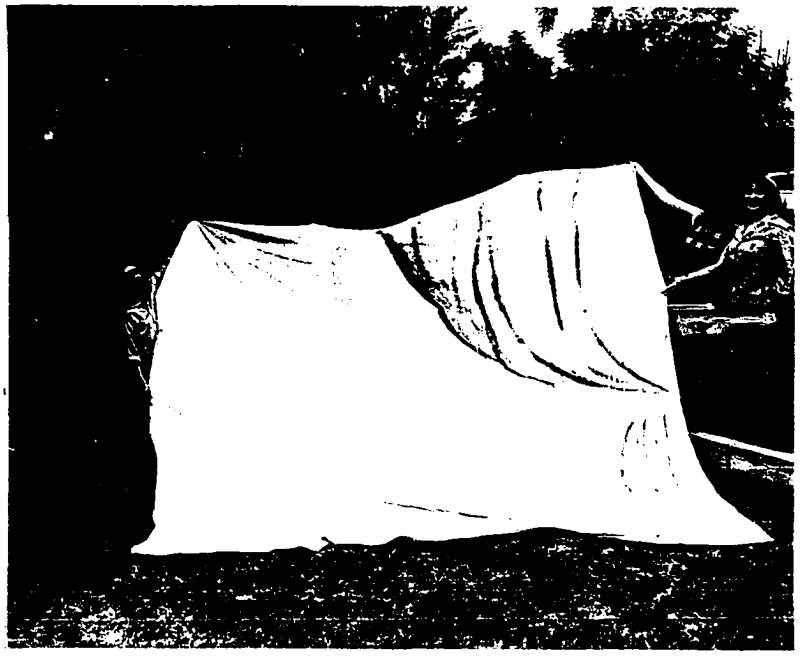

Above left - Dennis Harten paints signs for props symbolic of the king's commodities. Above right - a stick horse used as a prop by chorus members in issuing the decrees. Left - Yoshi Kawakita, Pat Riddle and Sharon Hunefeld hold up the sheet they dyed and painted for the backdrop setting for the inner court.

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long poles to symbolize the destruction of the Persians. Red crepe paper streamers hung from the poles to symbolize blood flowing and symbolic heads on them symbolized violence.

Interpretation through Script Development

Introduction After the group read and discussed Esther, we began creating the experimental theatre's script together. As I said in Chapter 4, Esther contains a subplot about Esther becoming queen and saving herself and her people, and a plot about the dynamics between Haman and Mordecai. The story concerns itself with the irreversibility of the decrees and the deliverance of the Jews threatened with extinction. In addition to these, we added reflections about Vashti described in Chapter 4. One of our major concerns was the problem of compressing all of the necessary information about these plots and themes from the seven chapters of Esther into an hour long theatre piece. John's structural analysis (see page 52) which divided the story into three parts became our overall structure for the script: Act I--the Rise to Power, Act II--The Struggle for Power, and Act III--the Ends of Power.

We went through each of these three parts and sought the major ideas which needed to be communicated in each act. With newsprint and marking pens, we sketched out the divisions and parallels between the various actions and what plot lines could be eliminated. This selective process helped us to identify points for emphasis. Then we went back and plotted out more of the details and action for each act. In the following pages I hope to illustrate how we interpreted through creating the play's three acts.

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Act I As we began creating the script for Act I, we expected the action to cover the rise to power of Haman, Mordecai, and Esther. However, the need for clarity, emphasis, and overall balance led us to change Act I's focus to center around the plot about Esther--the Jewish Heiress who became a queen in the Persian Court of King Ahasuerus.

Literary analysis showed us that some of the story's elements functioned primarily as literary devices to create mood, build tension, or develop character. We were able to cut some of these elements from the play's action because our own theatrical forms functioned in a similar way. This simplified the story and added emphasis to the main plot lines. One of the elements we cut in Act I was Queen Vashti's banquet.

As we created the script together we continued to return to the text and to consider the following questions: (1) What have you heard that you have not heard before? (2) What images do you see which you have not seen before? (3) What is the core of the text really trying to express? (4) What is the best way for us to express that?[8]

Our efforts to seek the meaning of the text and discover the best artistic forms for communicating it in the play are illustrated in the following example where we considered how to interpret the eunuchs' motives for killing the king:

John: Should we narrate it or act it out?
(Theresa describes how it could be pantomined.)
Karen: I would opt for not having the narrator say it.
Steve: The narrator can just set the context by interpreting the place and dialogue.

---

[8]Nelle Morton, Interview, February 1978.

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Ron: My feeling is the only thing we're doing is giving the plot and we can do more. I want to push us to what is the condition of the feeling we want to communicate besides the plot.
Karen: There's some sort of people's movement going on--that's the reason why they might be wanting to kill the king and it's not just the mere fact that the king (is bad personally)....that maybe we get a sense of massive oppression at the king's hand at this point.
Ron: Or exaggerated poverty.[9]

Further discussion in the group led us to consider a poetic art form to communicate the intention of the eunuchs for killing the king.

Ron: So maybe the poem or song would sound like: did the people love their king? Did the da da da da....
Karen: Almost like a chant.
Ron: So we see the action take place--so that the mime really communicates that plot. Or we can get the idea of the plot, but then we also communicate all these questions about everyone's motives.
Steve: So with the eunuchs, you can get what they're going is a part of a continuing concern, rather than simply: "What do you want to do today? Oh, let's go kill the king."[10]

As we discussed the plot against the king, we compared it to liberation movement coups against rich dictatorships. We decided that since this was a likely motive for their action, (the story doesn't give one) we would portray their action in this way. We considered ways to emphasize that point:

Theresa: If they are poor and powerless and wear rags, would they also be small instead of human size?
John: Small, hmmmmm.
Ron: Maybe a group of little puppets.
Theresa: With two in the center....a little crowd of puppets around the outside.
John: You could (have) something about initiating class struggle.
Karen: Have Mordecai come along, with a smile on, and discover them, and they just squash down.
Theresa: Oooooh (laughs) that's good.

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[9]"The Esther Project," April 13, 1978.

[10]Ibid.

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Frances and John Takahuta make "Freedom Fighter" hand puppets.

"Freedom Fighter" hand puppets perform on the puppet stage.

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Karen: But Mordecai won't be their same size.
Theresa: Mordecai will be enormous....This great big head and these little tiny people.[11]

As we sought to give emphasis to the plot and simplify the script we eventually created ritual and pageantry as Chapter 5 describes. This re-arrangement used timing, contrasts, movement, space and color to make the whole piece more dynamic.

We explored the function of the chorus, lights, costumes, masks and puppets to see how each form could enhance the action and mood of Act I. Our consideration of music is an example of the way we sought to find artistic forms for our interpretation:

Steve: What kind of music is being contemplated for these?
Karen: The first one, the very first one when Haman leads the parade out and blows the whistle is going to be: doo, doo doo, doo do, doo doo. (From John Philip Sousa.)
Steve: Ok--that's my question--is it going to be John Philip Sousa style or New Orlean's Carnival? (Snaps fingers) Ta, da, dad, da dum.
Karen: One of them.
Ron: You know what just came to me is (that) this last one (should be) what was that show? Well you know the cigar commercial (sings) "and then he walks in my life - bum bud da da da dee da dee." (John and Karen join singing the rest of "Big Spender" with him.)
Ron: That song might work for the pagaent.[12]

Music for the second parade (after the hanging) was a cacophonous mixture of course rough sounds, squeals and cat calls. Throughout the first act, the music had a coarseness and boisterousnes to it which portrayed the climate of the unruly, rowdy part of the court. Even the bridal march celebrating Esther's crowing as queen had a boisterousness to it. Thus, the music supported the action of the plot by giving a

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[11]Ibid.

[12]"The Esther Project," March 16, 1978.

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Above left - Paul Tokahuta prepares to play drums. Above right - Bruce Bell at the gong. Lower left - Karen Campbell plays the base guitar. Instruments used included traditional instruments: bass drum, snare drum, tamborine, auto harp, tuba, violin, flute, clarinet and cello; and untraditional instruments: kazoos, coconut shells, spoons and gong, voices screeching and yelling, and other devices to create boisterous or horrific sounds.

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feeling tone for our interpretation.

In general, Act I was a fast moving high energy act with lots of sound, noise, and images. Vashti's slow deliberate response to the hanging, juxtaposed with boisterous action, made her response more explicit and powerful. For the most part, however, Act I had a carnival-like atmosphere with no attempt to be realistic. It introduced the characters, showed the nature of the king's court, foreshadowed events to come, and began the plot development.

Act II The main action within Act II was the struggle for power which we had outlined. It portrayed Haman's rise to power, Mordecai's rise to power, and their rivalry, which is the second major plot. We used various disciplines to explore each of their characters and the dynamics between them.

As we created the script, we were concerned about holding the audience's attention following the high energy level of Act I.

> Ron: This is pageantry at its greatet done with music, with crowds and movement, with multi-focus events sometimes. This goes on fifteen or twenty minutes. And I want you to place yourself in the audience's place. What we need is a quiet scene here.
> John: Because this is noise and laughter.
> Ron: Because the people stop thinking in one frame after fifteen minutes.[13]

Because of this need for changes in rhythm and style, in Scene 1 we portrayed Haman's growth quietly and also made Scene 2 into a quiet scene.

With scene 3, our play erupted again. This scene portrays the issuing of irreversible decree:

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[13]"The Esther Project," March 31, 1978.

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Theresa: It's a very high energy scene....people running in all sorts of directions.
John: You know the way it could be, instead of having a decree come and someone read it--have all these copies come out (of the king's xerox machine) and people grab them to take them to all parts of the kingdom. (Laughter)
Karen: What would be neat would be for the chorus to take little stick horses and go out into the congregation.[14]

We created stylized stick horses which the chorus members rode after the decree was read and issued. They galloped all over the church to the accompaniment of "William Tell's Overature" (the Lone Ranger's theme song). Then the words of the decree filled the space of the sanctuary, as the chorus read them from the balcony, from behind, and from the front of the audience.

Ron: I think the decree scene leads itself to humor. If I put myself in the audience's place I can laugh at that. I can laugh at the king being manipulated, at the way the decrees go out, at the horsemen riding maybe on their stick ponies. I can laugh at all of that and then be more moved by the fact that in the next scene what I was laughing at I now know can cause great distress; what we took so lightly a minute ago, is really very important.
Theresa: Almost the wickedness of the laughter.
Ron: So we pull the audience into being a part of that.
Steve: You already know with the foreshadowing--what's at stake in the whole business and on the one hand it's primarily amusing, there's also an undercurrent of assidiousness about the whole thing, which the audience is aware of.[15]

The juxtaposition of the humor with the nature of the decree and the response which followed emphasized the horror.

We created the response which followed, with a combination of art forms. Tricia composed a poem, "The Shock of Fear Descends," for which Hunt composed music. After the tolling of a bell, Vashti came out on the stage. Her face was unmasked (Masking as Embodiment) to portray her humanness and express her compassion. Her costume at this point was

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[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

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The messenger (played by Toni Bynum) reads the decree while chorus member (played by Bruce Epperly) responds.

The chorus members take their stick horses to disperse the decree.

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a simple dress. Costuming further interpreted the action: Mordecai stripped off his robe after he read the decree and put on sackcloth. He also took a sign saying "Ashes" and hung it on his forehead. After Vashti started singing the mournful dramatic song, she began leading the chorus in a ritual procession down the center aisle. The chorus joined in the song as they followed. In addition, the lighting went down and a simple spot followed them. All of these art forms were used to emphasize the grief and plight of the Jews.

Following the mourning procession, the next scene changed the pace again. We portrayed Esther back fully enjoying the setting of the palace. A stately Strauss waltz set the mood. In the middle of the scene, Mordecai tried to convince Esther to appeal to the king for the sake of her people. We explored artistic forms for building tension and suspense in order to emphasize the fear and courage in her dangerous entrance into the king's court. We built tension with narration, and the movements the eunuch made, who carried messages between Esther and Mordecai. Since we had only watched Mordecai's actions and never heard his voice up to that point, his speaking added an element of surprise to build anxiety over the seriousness of Esther's mission. Esther also spoke for the first time. At first, she asked him not to bother her, but as she spoke, the reality hit her. The sound of her voice revealed her anxiety over the severity of the decree and what she was being asked to do. Her anxiety was emphasized even further by the chant of the chorus saying words like: "Perish, perish, perish, perish."

We portrayed Esther's courage in her approach to the king with movement and sound:

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Hathach (played by Sue Lemly) carries messages and garments which Esther (played by Rita Brock) sends to Mordecai so he will take off his sackcloth and ashes. See the play, page 153-154.

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John: I mean you could have her go all the way from the back of the church before the king lowers his sceptor and....
Theresa: Bum, bum, bum, bum (ominously).
John: And it could sound like that--like a death march with one drum; you could get that really heavy feeling because she really goes long enough because if that...beat...beat...beat...beat... really goes...it's...going...to...start...getting...on... people's...nerves...until the whole thing is over with!! BLBDBDBDBDBDBDBDBDB BUM!! Shew.[16]

In Scene 6 the king's sleepless night when he asked for a story, provided humor for the play, which provided a contrast to the seriousness which pervaded the previous scenes. We asked Richard to write the king's bedtime story and to play the part of the storyteller. The down-home, slow humor of Richard's story and ad-libs gave variety to the play.

Act II contained eight scenes which were very different from each other. We worked carefully to make each part bear relationship to the previous action and to the whole play.

Narration was one artistic form which helped bring coherence to the total play. It helped us create transitions and give focus to the action. It also helped us hear directly from the text because in many places we used the text from Esther for narration.

In Summary, Act II had a number of scenes which provided the audience a variety of moods, styles and rhythm while interpreting the necesary plot development about The Struggle for Power.

Act III The culmination of the play, in Act III, focused on "The Ends of Power." After the variety Act II presented, we were concerned at first about maintaining audience interest through transitions between many short scenes. Therefore, we eliminated some

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[16]Ibid.

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of the action and combined other elements to make the final act more cohesive and so reduced the number of scenes from eight to five.

During Act III we had to pay special attention to maintaining coherence with the other acts and creating unity with the whole play. We sought to tie symbolic images with images from other acts. For example, Esther's inheritance of Haman's wealth (half of King Ahasuerus' wealth) was portrayed in Act III with signs symbolizing his commercial goods. We decided these symbols also needed to be used in the beginning, so we had the chorus parade out the same signs in Act I to introduce them in developing his character.

We also wanted continuity throughout the script in regards to the decrees:

> Karen: What I want to ask is: When this edict comes out allowing vindication, is it the same; is it going to be like a rerun of the way the first decree went out? I think it would be strong if...we can parallel that first action to show that the methods aren't changing; (that) it's not a liberating process at all. They're kind of trapped by the same method.[17]

By using the same format for issuing the decree as used in Act II, we were able to provide continuity. The only differences were in who initiated the decree and what it said.

To portray the "Ends of Power" for Haman, we built tension with action, dialogue, and irony. The chorus emphasized the main action as they did so throughout the play. They watched Esther, Haman, and the king, echoing abstract feelings; for example, the chorus watched fearful, shivering, huddled together. They chanted in unison,

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[17]"The Esther Project," April 10, 1978.

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"Esther! Ask Him! Ask the King to save us,"[18] and other phrases.

Dialogue built the tension further:

> King: Who has presumed to do such a thing as this?
> Esther: A foe and an enemy.
> King: An enemy? A foe? Who?
> Esther: He, he....he is.... (As the scene builds, Haman gets more and more nervous, fidgety.)
> King: Who is this vile murderer?
> Esther: He is....He is....
> King: Who? Who?
> Esther: This wicked Haman. (She falls onto couch in exhaustion....King blows up in anger.)[19]

The irony built over the fact that Haman, who had commanded the killing of Mordecai and all of the Jews, was tripping up by a Jewish woman. The humor of the irony was depicted in his literal fall:

> Ron: I love it where he fell on the couch just as the King walks back in....What are you doing on the couch now?
> Karen: I know. There is something really melodramatic about this.
> Ron: He could kneel in front of her and trip (laughter).
> Dennis: The text also seems to indicate that both were a little drunk at this point (laughter).
> Karen: Yeah, it keep saying drinking wine, drinking wine.
> Dennis: "You've got to help me, Esther. You've got to help me." And she says, "Bug off."
> Ron: And then he trips and falls right across her lap and the king walks right in and sees that.[20]

The final scene in Act III was the climax of the play. We built the cresendo with powerful images, sound, and movement. We began by mapping out the action with the gallows:

> John: I want a slaughter. I don't care what else we have but I want a slaughter.
> Ron: Yeah, 500 men in that one day.
> Karen: We could throw lots of wigs out on the stage. (Laughter)

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[18]"Esther, A Communally Created Experimental Theatre Piece," p. 161.

[19]Ibid., p. 161-162.

[20]"The Esther Project," March 2, 1978.

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Sue: Throw bodies down.
Theresa: We talked abut the connection with Gallo wine and the wine press blood idea running people through the wringer.
Karen: Yes, (excited) you know what I would like to do? If we use their blood as wine, we could have the people drinking that blood (which is) making them drunk to kill. That could be the motif--that's how the craziness and fury mounts upon us.
John: How do you do it without making it so blatant it loses its power? How are you going to make it obvious what we're doing?
Karen: Maybe you don't need the wringer idea.
Ron: What about a line of people walking in a spiral and in the spiral (there are) banners (so) that it looks like they're walking through it (the blood). I think the point of blood flowing is not a hard thing. Any red flowing is going to give that idea.[21]

The symbolism we finally decided upon for the above portrayal was poles from which hung red crepe paper and heads (see description, page 101) and with clashing swords which symbolized killing. Simultaneous to this depiction of blood and violence, Mordecai put on Haman's clothing; Mordecai, Esther, and King Aha, all mimed drinking from the gallows' flow of blood. As they became drunk on the fruit of the gallows, the chorus' action became more frenzied; the screeching and horrible noise mounted; the lights shone red on Esther, Mordecai, and King Aha and their actions grew more riotous. Suddenly the action and sound froze. The bell tolled. Vashti cried her song.

Act III portrayed an escalation of the previous action in the play. The crescendo was amplified by use of rhythm, sound, music, dialogue, and other forms. For us it was the culmination of our interpretation of Esther.

Summary of the Total Scripts As illustrated in the previous pages, Acts I, II and III were each different in mood and style. Act I was a fast moving, carnival-like act which was basically one scene. Act

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[21]"The Esther Project," April 10, 1978.

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II, which provided a great deal of variety in style and mood, had eight scenes. Act III was a short act which escalated action of the play up to the final climax.

As illustrated in the previous pages, despite their differences there was a unity among the three acts. They were similar in their use of art forms. All of them used a combination of masked actors, music, lights, narration, set, symbolic props and dialogue to communicate. Each of them used ritual modes appropriate for the plot development. All of them were created in a style of Holy Theatre.

Developing the Play through Rehearsals

After we finished creating the script for the play, "Esther," we shared our interpretation with the actors, musicians and technicians in a general rehearsal. Everyone sat in a circle and introduced himself or herself and told what parts or part he or she had in the creation up to that point. Karen, John, Sue, Ron and I shared our fundamental ideology and described the way we developed our process and our interpretation through the play, "Esther."

Although actors, musicians and technicians joined after the script was written, they had a part in creating the final interpretation of "Esther." We did not view the script as a static interpretation. We were open to re-arranging, changing and eliminating parts as recommended by the larger group. Some people made additions to the script. Each person added his or her own touch in the production. As a result the play changed and evolved from the time of writing until its final presentation. This section describes a few aspects particular to our rehearsals.

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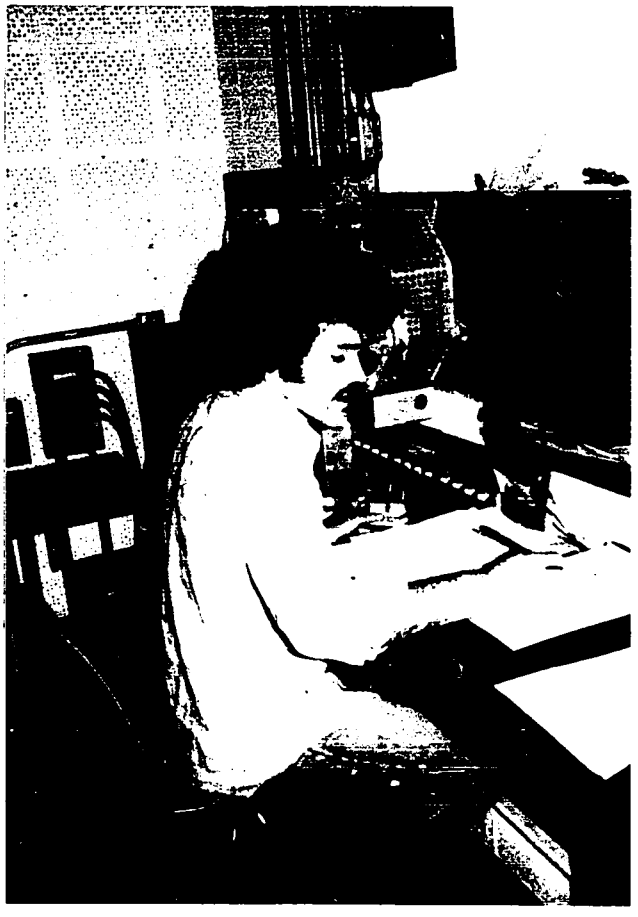

Above left, Frank Ulrich prepares lighting. Above right, David Drake works on lights. Left, Ron Robertson, one of the directors, describes the set.

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Before I describe the situation further, let me explain the particular situation in which we were involved. A major influence on all of us was the problem of working under a tight time schedule. For one thing all of us were full time students, staff or faculty at the School of Theology. In addition to that, most participants had jobs and/or family responsibilities and social commitments. People's participation in "The Esther Project" was entirely voluntary and extra-curricular. The group started studying the book Esther in February when the semester began. However, since we usually could not meet more than once a week because of people's schedules, it took a long time to study and interpret Esther. Because we had put May 2nd and May 7th on the calendar and advertised it as our production date, we were under a lot of time pressure to get everything written in time for the actors to start rehearsing.

During the first rehearsal the script was outlined but not scripted, so we rehearsed the outline with improvisations. Improvisation at this stage didn't work that well because persons who hadn't been a part of the writing process were not familiar enough with the story and interpretation of "The Esther Project" up to that point to know what action to take. After the script for Act I was ready, we rehearsed the chorus and main characters. By then, is was already April 18th and I was worried. The actors seemed to be worried also--for good reason.

This time line put everyone under pressure, especially toward the end, when not only the time of production was drawing near, but also the deadline for papers and exams at the end of the semester. At a point of incredible frustration I shared thoughts similar to this with

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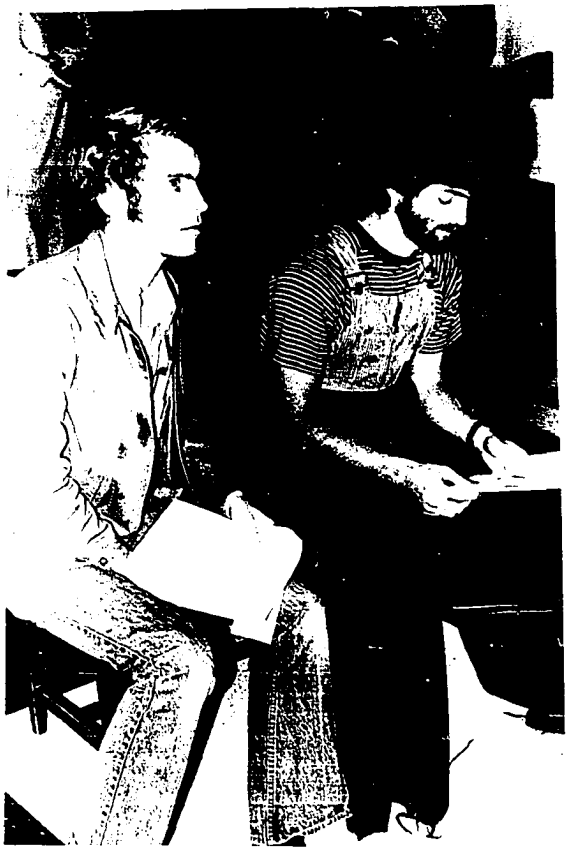
Nerida Drake rehearses her part as the narrator.

Below left - Mark Bollwinkle and Sharon Hunefeld, chorus members, rehearse. Below right - John Linscheid, who played King Ahasuerus, and Peter St. Martin, who played Haman, prepare their parts at a rehearsal.



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the group at rehearsal to encourage all of us:

> There's a lot of tension among us, because there is so much to do and such a short time to do it, and because I have not managed everyone's time here as well as I should have. My weaknesses have been made very visible to you. We have all made a lot of mistakes and we're anxious. But I want us to get beyond that in the midst of it. Most of us are inexperienced at what we are doing and that is anxiety producing, but its also very exciting. It puts us on the creative edge to discover new aspects about ourselves--good and bad.
>
> ....We can go beyond that (I had explained about masks as disguise, symbol and transformation) and let not only the masks, but the whole process be a transforming one. It's like giving birth. We are in the painful stage of labor.
>
> Think of the process as transformation. You can think of it as ritual and message--a very powerful statement about the sacredness of life.
>
> In the process of doing this I know that I get my perspective about the Creator and my own involvement in the creative process out of balance. I start putting the play itself in the center and forget about our relationship to God in this and that God is the source of our creativity and life. I think we can use God's help right here now, too, to help us keep the proper perspective--not taking ourselves too seriously, but trying to maintain some sense of balance, remembering God as our Source of life.
>
> Remember, as we do this play, that we are not after a polished effect. It's part of the process and the intent to be a poverty theatre and a rough theatre where the emphasis is on the message--a very powerful statement about the sacredness of life.
>
> Let the powerful images that have been corporately created from exploring the text come alive with intensity and speak to us and through us, as you add your own creative dimension to it. In this kind of theatre--the creative process does not stop, but keeps going until the final movement.[22]

After we had rehearsed a couple of weeks, the dress rehearsal came--only too quickly. Dennis was still getting props ready. Alan and Ron were putting up curtains for the set. Last minute adjustments were made for masks and costumes. The light people were getting ready. There was an air of expectancy, but also an air of tension and anxiety.

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[22]Theresa Mason, Journal, April 27, 1978.

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And in true form for dress rehearsal, it was terrible, and everyone was angry.

But then out of the chaos (on the second run through) the pieces began to come together--the lights, the music, the acting, the rhythm of it all--amazing. The mood changed. A new hope was born. Three persons stayed up until 2:30 a.m. discussing the ups and downs of our process together.

The Presentation of the Experimental Theatre Piece--"Esther"

The day of the first performance was filled with a thousand last minute things to be done. We had planned on eating pizza together between a brief rehearsal and the performance, but we didn't have time to get pizza and several people were disappointed. We rehearsed, went over rehearsal notes, stapled on the last elastics for the masks, and cleared the stage just in time.

The jazz music began, while the audience came in. I checked to make sure everyone was ready. Everyone was in her or his place. I gave the cue for lights.

And then it happened--by the grace of God. There were mistakes for sure; nevertheless, it was a success, and everyone knew it. The audience was small but terrific--responsive, laughing and responding to the moods of joy and sadness. They stormed on the stage afterwards with their praise.

We did the second show five nights later, with not as much pizazz as the first one, but it was smoother and we had another terrific audience.

After the performance, we cleaned up the church, put the set in

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order and took off for the cast party. We released lots of tension at the party. People were in good moods, laughing, rejoicing. They were pleased that the people received the message. We celebrated!....And we had pizza.

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Chapter 7

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Introduction

As I have narrated the story about "The Esther Project," I have tried to capture the spirit of our study and creation. I wanted to share something which would convey the way Esther burst forth from the Bible and had an impact on our lives. With quotations and descriptions, I have tried to convey the intrigue of the world within the Esther text and our provocative discussions relating the ancient context to our own times. I highlighted ways we created our interpretation through various disciplines. At some points I have shown ways in which the text provoked us about our society and about our own selves. At other points I have indicated our individual and group struggles in facing our own shortcomings, both as addressed by the text and by the process of creating the production together. The script unveiled our rage over brutality and violence and our passion for the vision we have been given. "The Esther Project" had its highs and its lows; it was intense; it was a means of grace.

This chapter relfects upon the values and shortcomings of the process. My critique benefits from hindsight, but it is included here not only to culminate the story of "The Esther Project" but also to share with other groups which might consider a similar project so they might learn from our experiences.

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Creating Corporately

I wanted to lead the production in such a way that everyone would interact as equals despite their given social status. However, differences in abilities and levels of skill sometimes got in the way of realizing that vision. It would have been better to recognize different abilities for the various art forms and set up a coordinating team from the beginning to work on them. A better management model for me would have been the Body of Christ analogy that recognizes the different gifts and abilities of each individual, yet affirms the complementary relationships each one has. The model affirms individual sources of power as given through the Spirit; these gifts are not above or below one another, but rather support each other.

Although the process was essentially a corporate experience, I was the primary leader for the project and did much of the exegetical work. The strength of my leadership was in acting as a catalyst, recognizing and calling forth people's gifts and acting as an enabler to them. However, I wasn't very organized, and that I feel was a significant drawback, especially working with our short timeline. Although simplicity was a goal of ours, the whole thing mushroomed out of proportion. Because those creating the play had other major full time responsibilities, deadlines were often missed.

In many ways, the experience was new for most of us. Most people hadn't made masks or puppets before. Some who acted had little or no previous experience. None of us had ever written a collective theatrical interpretation before. I had never directed before. Because so much of the process was created as we went along, we had to risk. Sometimes I felt my weaknesses were blown up like a giant balloon for

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people to see. The writers worried about whether or not we would get finished on time. Nevertheless, we were able to come together: "each feeling vulnerable about our lack of experience--yet risking, sharing and creating together."[1] Out of the fear and chaos came creation.

Community Building

The dynamics which occurred within the group are hard to portray in a written description. I must confess that there were strains in this interaction at times, but most of the time the fellowship was great. There were nights when friends stayed up past midnight bubbling out ideas. One day we spent working, playing, laughing and eating together. Other times we mapped out the script around a bowl of hot soup. We scheduled a potluck supper the night of the last performance, and people brought simple items to share--bread, cheese, fruit and beverages. We didn't have much time to rehearse, but we had a great time eating together. Sharing food in high tension times like this had a very special value for us. It gave us an opportunity to strengthen and support each other, release tension and enjoy one another's company. All of these, plus more special times together, helped to make this a worthwhile experience.

After the production, some people said they enjoyed the chance it gave them to get to know people they would never had met under other circumstances. People of different ages who were a part of the School of Theology community got involved. Students, spouses, professors and staff were involved together in the creation: "It allows us to come

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[1]Theresa Mason, poem, p. 1.

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Directors, Ron Robertson and Theresa Mason (behind book), encourage one another in a frustrating moment.

Pat Riddle and Jeff Inlow work together to create a crowd puppet.

Sue Lemly, Yoshie Kawakita, Theresa Mason and Jeff Inlow share spaghetti and fellowship.

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together as equals--children and adults, professors and students."[2] Friendships grew and were strengthened because of this particular corporate experience. We grew closer thorugh the good times and the bad:

> I discovered that conflict can be a creative source of power when it is done in honesty, and when we can forgive and accept one another. It seems to lead to a greater respect for one another and a deepening of relationship.[3]

Our process sparked the creativity of Trish's poetry, Hunt's composing, Josephine's puppets, Sharon's costumes, Ron's sense of drama, Marguerite's expressions, and much more. It was this creativity which helped form our collective hermeneutical process and its final expression. "Not only does it make what is invisible in the abstract visible, it makes the creative urge in each one of us and the creative interaction among us visible. And this is holy."[4]

The presentation of "Esther" was a way of sharing the whole process with a wider community. We bore witness to our interpretation of the text and to our involvement in creating the play together. It was a work of the people, for the people: "Our play is a sharing of love. And this is holy."[5] The community's response in turn was great. There were criticisms as well, but overall comments were positive. Members of the audience indicated their appreciation of our message and the way we communicated that through masks, puppets, ritual and music.

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Theresa Mason, Journal, May 1978.

[4]Theresa Mason, poem, p. 1.

[5]Ibid.

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Paul Schurman (who played Mordecai) and Rita Brock (who played Esther) share at a rehearsal.

Bruce Epperly and Katie Gould, chorus members, at a rehearsal.

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Interdisciplinary Method

The purpose of exegesis and hermeneutics according to Walter Wink is: "So to interpret the Scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation."[6] He condems modern Biblical criticism for being bankrupt. The value of our interdisciplinary approach was that it brought the ancient Biblical message into our present day. The word became tangible to us as we dealt with it through verbal and non-verbal means. Interpretation through various art forms helped us make the story valid and fresh while maintaining its symbolic function. I felt our corporate interdisciplinary form gave life to the Scripture in such a way that Esther emerged from sterile research into an exciting experience.

However, this interdisciplinary method fell short on some accounts. We should have waited to begin our artistic interpretations, as well as the discusison, until after a more complete exegesis had been made, as Chapter 3 indicates. This would have allowed us to sculpt and draw more on the basis of the text's own terms. At times when we let the text speak we were simply like ventriloquists throwing our own voices into the text; some of our artistic forms were more our own personal creative desires than our response to the text, just as at times our response to the world came before listening to the text's message for the world. Here we were subject to isogesis and thus using the text as propaganda. At some points our message might have been too

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[6]Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 2.

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blatant. We tried to help each other avoid isogesis and propaganda, and we tried to be aware that our passion for transforming the world tempted us to make the text say what we wanted it to say. We reminded each other that we were subject to error, and from the beginning we recognized that our interpretation of Esther was simply one of many. But as the poem states: "we have studied the text to let it speak to our own fundamental ideas about the nature of human existence."[7]

Our whole process of exegesis and hermeneutics would have been improved by scheduling regular evaluations of our process. We should have evaluated all we had done after we finished our exegesis and from time to time during our hermeneutical process. Evaluations would have also benefited our development of the script and our process leading up to production.

We recognized the theater piece wasn't so much a restatement of the book as it was a dialogue with it. "In this respect the theatre piece grants an autonomy to the text because it does not pretend to be identical with the original."[8] Because it could be dialogue rather than a re-statement of the story, we dared to ask questions of the text. We allowed the text to call the world and ourselves into question:

> Interpretation is then no longer a question of accepting or rejecting what is said in the text, but of self and social exploration in terms of the questions which the text, possibly even in an inadequate or antiquated way, has nevertheless been indispensable in helping us to recover.[9]

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[7]See page 1.

[8]John Linscheid, Hermeneutics and 'The Esther Project'" (Elkhart, IN: 1979), p. 12.

[9]Wink, p. 67.

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As we studied the text, its message for our own context became increasingly more apparent. As we developed characterizations of Esther, Mordecai, Haman and Vashti, the hidden dimensions of the work's literary meaning hit home to our lives--meanings that pointed not only to the injustices in Haman, the enemy, but also in Mordecai, Esther, and the whole system. Esther drew us to an interpretation that shouted "no" against the brutalities we saw in Esther's world as well as our own world. We saw people with good intentions caught up in a system as brutal as what they had once opposed. We felt that that message had something to say about the evil in our own lives and in our own society, and we decided to portray our interpretation that way. It was not the common interpretation in which Esther's courage is emphasized and the victory of the Jews is emphasized. Although we saw Esther's courage and wanted to celebrate that, as well as celebrate the liberation ideas of the oppressed Jews. We also saw that in human nature courage is often distorted into pride. Human life is filled with ambiguities. Answers are seldom clear-cut. That is how we saw Esther--filled with ambiguities in her motives and actions.

Apart from the Purim festival, the common interpretation of the book fails to question the competition and vengence which allows one group of people to win "victory" over another by slaughtering them. Our own context showed us a world that continuously proclaims the importance and validity of violent situations. When this context and the text met each other, our Christian perspective demanded a new interpretation.

Our Christian perspective proclaims that victory does not come in a revengeful slaughter but emerges through suffering and even death. The Christian vision shows us that death and revenge do not have

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the last word; it is redemption, grace, forgiveness and life that are ultimate. We have been given a promise--a hope that life can transcend the brutality of oppression, injustice, and the evil within our own selves.

It is because of this vision that we interpreted Esther as we did. Essentially, we made the piece Christian. We did not set out to make our interpretation Christian, and we did not do it blatantly, but when the story was subjected to our values and context, we saw retribution and retaliation in a new way. "Our message is part of our vision of human destiny. It cries no, No, NO! to that brutality and injustice. And this is holy."[10]

Prophetic Theatre

The prophetic literature contains the seven categories, which were given on page 15, to describe the prophets' radical messages of truth. These same categories can be used to examine our play, "Esther," to evaluate it as prophetic theatre. Although the creators of "Esther" were named in the program, we didn't give our credentials like the classical Old Testament prophets (Category 1). However, we did appeal to the authority of Esther as an epic tradition, and the narrator, in particular, cited that tradition directly from the Bible (Category 2.)

The play did not directly state, "repent," like Category 3, but it is implied by mirroring personal and societal sins. As my poem states, "It cried no, No, NO! to that brutality and injustice."[11]

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[10]See page 1.

[11]Ibid.

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A chorus member (played by Sharon Hunefeld) reads the decree.

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Vashti's bold response to the king was a model for the congregation to follow, and she continued to come and face them at each new violent act. She also pleaded to God, singing, "Lord Have Mercy," after each brutal action. Like Jeremiah and other prophets, Vashti became a character who agonized over the condition of her people.

Indirectly, the play was an indictment against "triumpantalism" and greed for power. It focused primarily on social evils (like the prophecy of Amos) rather than on cultic sin. However, one could infer an indictment against idolatry of selfishness, power or revenge from it. By showing us the ways Mordecai's and Esther's good intentions got distorted into selfish sinful ways, it indirectly condemned us.

Like the previous categories, 3 and 4, Category 5--Judgement Sentences--is not explicitly stated. However, it was easy to infer judgement from the total play. The music, silence, irony, the tolling bell, and all of the arts sought to depict the brutality of both the decrees and the final slaughter of the Persians. In particular the gallows were a constant symbol of death and destruction. Ironically those who chose to plot death (Haman and the Freedom Fighter eunuchs who plotted to kill the king) were killed themselves. The audience was not told what the future would be for Esther, King Ahauserus and Mordecai, but in the final scene, the three were left drinking the blood from the 500 people destroyed one day, the 300 killed the next day in Susa, and the 75,000 enemies slaughtered in other provinces. Although the audience was not directly condemned for similar behavior, the program contained this writing:

> In Biblical times weapons of bronze came to be replaced by weapons of irony. Later historians would refer to this dramatic period as The Age of Irony. Haman, who through the spectacles of his own pride sees himself as "the man whom the king wishes to honour,"

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becomes the agent of both Mordecai's rise and his own fall.

> Mordecai and Haman both share the same myopic vision of reality. One man is pre-eminent and everyone else is subservient. Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman is based not upon any profound longing for social justice, but rather, upon Mordecai's own pride and arrogance. Simply stated, Mordecai wants Haman's job.
>
> It appears that although the players change uniforms, the game remains the same. There is, however, an insidious aspect to this role reversal. As the roles are reversed the violence is magnified. What Haman had intended for Mordecai, Mordecai now unleashes against not only Haman, but the ten sons as well.
>
> We see that Mordecai wants not only to defend himself, but to retaliate as well. The retailiation amplifies the destruction, slaughter, annihilation. The couriers assure us that "such behavior is indeed commendable." Of course, this is only a play, a dramatic presentation.[12]

We showed life as we saw the text address it, and that included the ugliness of our own sin, represented by Mordecai and Esther, and represented by visual puns and comments which pointed towards our cultural and national injustices. This was a tragic statement, but it was how we understood our interpretation. Instead of judgement from God, it must be noted, that in "Esther," judgement was human inflicted.

It was not a popular statement for our time. However, prophetic types of communication and concern about social injustices were in vogue at the School of Theology, so presenting it to that audience was not a major risk. Although we communicated the right message for the right time in history, we did not communicate it to the right people, which is another important aspect of context. We did not address governmental leaders or other persons with power, like many of the Old Testament prophets; we did not address the society at large, corporations which we satirized, or persons who would consider that our ideas were foolish.

---

[11]Steve Dominguez, The Program "A Community Created Experimental Theater Piece," (Claremont, CA: May 1978).

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Instead, we addressed persons in an audience which primarily agreed with us. Thus, by not addressing people who needed to hear our message, the play's prophetic edge was weakened.

Vashti was the figure in the play who came closest to any prophetic character. As I have noted, she was the one who defied convention for her values and not only said "no" to that power structure but also cried out against it and mourned those who suffered at its hands, whether Persian or Jewish. Vashti not only symbolized a call for reformation, indictment, and judgement, but also the hope of Categories 6 and 7. Because this one character was able to see the evils of her society, say "no," and be transformed (shown visually through costume change and unmasking), she symbolized hope that others might also see and be transformed. She showed a prophetic response that called others to also be transformed and seek a new day and a new way. Despite the tragedy in the plight and power of Vashti, and the tragedy of the play, hope is given because she kept alive the vision of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Implications for the Church

It is my hope that churches and other groups will choose to evolve their own corporate interdisciplinary Biblical interpretations. I think the church community can benefit from this approach to Bible study. It helps the ancient text come alive for persons of all ages so the Bible can address individuals, the community, and the world.

Normally, Bible study is restricted to the classroom, and the sharing of Biblical interpretation comes only from the pulpit. A corporate hermeneutic expressed through Holy theatre, puppetry, masks or

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some other art form can give people a chance to share their own understanding with the wider community of faith.

The process allows each person, young and old, to contribute to the Body of Christ according to his or her own abilities. Such a project brings people together with a common purpose to explore something of meaning for their lives. As they do so, possibilities for deepening fellowship emerge.

The artistic forms we used in "The Esther Project" are seldom used in churches for Biblical interpretation. Puppets are sometimes used for communicating with children, but they are rarely used for serious adult Biblical interpretation. We use rituals within worship, but churches seldom explore possibilities of new forms for rituals to interpret ancient traditions, and ritual modes are seldom used to interpret the Word. Holy Theatre is seldom used in the church. Finally, masks are almost never used in church. I think each of these art forms have great possibilities for Biblical interpretation in local churches.

Each community needs to find the appropriate form for the text they choose and for their own particular interests and abilities. Whereas puppets may work best for one text as interpreted by one community, pantomime with masks may be better for a different group. When a group is considering such a project, the Guidelines of the Hermeneutical Triangle and the Guidelines for appropriate forms for expression listed in Chapter 2 can help in creating a responsible interpretation of a text.

Of course there are risks in pursuing such a project. People may feel vulnerable in trying something they have never done before;

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people become vulnerable to criticism or ridicule in sharing themselves with others. Both individuals and the total group risk making errors or creating a failure. There are also risks which come when the text, the context, and the hermeneutics lead to a prophetic understanding of the text which goes against common practice and thought. Finally there is the risk in being confronted by what the text has to say to our own lives. But if people are willing to take these risks, they can create exciting possibilities for Biblical study and interpretation.

Collective interdisciplinary hermeneutics enable the ancient Scriptures to come alive in the present situation. This is a way for the text, any text, to speak freshly to a community of faith.

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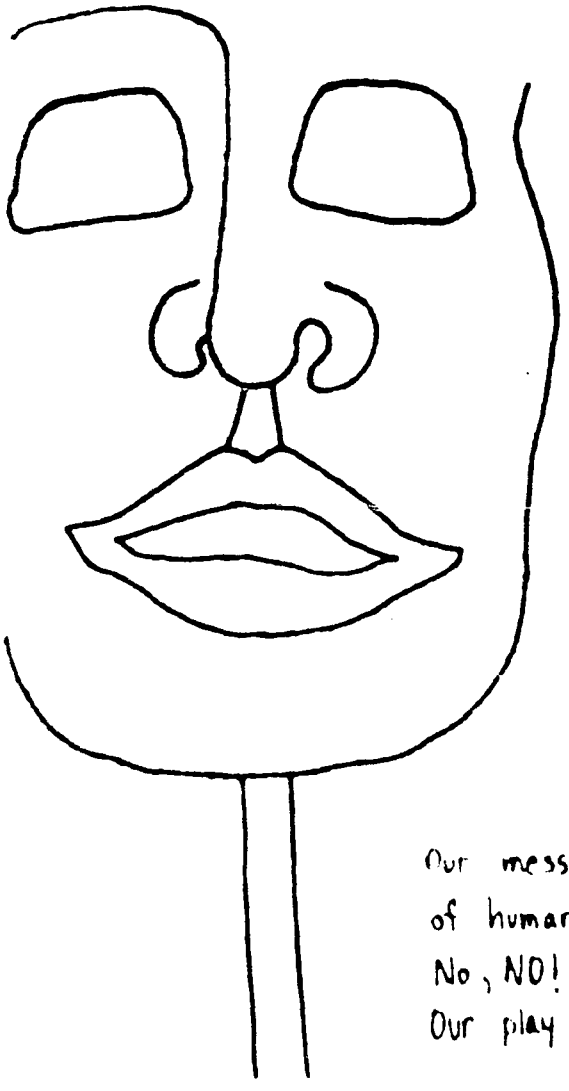
ESTHER

THEATRE WITH MASKS AND PUPPETS

PRESENTED BY THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY CLAREMONT

MAY 2nd AT 8:00 p.m. ▭
a general production
MAY 7th AT 7:00 p.m. ▭
a special youth group
production ▭ opportunity
for small group discussion



Location: CLAREMONT
UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH, next to
the SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
on FOOTHILL.

A free-will offering
will be taken.

Our message is part of our vision
of human destiny. It cries no,
No, NO! to brutality and injustice.
Our play is a sharing of love.

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ESTHER

A Communally Created Experimental Theatre Piece

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THE CAST

VASHTI.....Marguerite Terrell
KING AHASUERUS.....John Linscheid
HAMAN.....Peter St. Martin
ESTHER.....Rita Brock
MORDECAI.....Paul Schurman

CHORUS

HATACH.....Sue Lemly
HEGAI.....Mark Bollwinkel
MESSENGER.....Toni Bynum
NARRATOR.....Nerida Drake
STORYTELLER.....Richard Hunt
HARBONA.....Katie Gould
Sharon Hunefeld
Bruce Epperly
Lisa Devitt

THE MUSICIANS

Ron Robertson, Brad Starr, Dan Campbell, Paul Tokahuta, Bruce Bell, Karen Campbell, Alan Luddington, Dave Ninas, Hunt Beyer, Becky Beyer.

LIGHTS

Lon Rycroft, Frank Ulrich, Alan Luddington, Malcolm Drake, Jack Coogan.

SOUND

Bruce Bell, Hunt Beyer.

PUBLICITY

Peter Vaught, Sue Lemly, Toni Bynum, Paul Schurman, Ron Robertson, Karen Campbell, Steve Dominguez.

DIRECTORS

Ron Robertson, Theresa Mason

STAGE MANAGER

Karen Campbell

PRODUCER, PRODUCTION MANAGER

Theresa Mason

PHOTOGRAPHS

Paul Beal, Theresa Mason

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PROGRAMS

Steve Dominguez, Judy Finau, Linda Inlow, Theresa Mason.

WRITERS

John Linscheid, Karen Campbell, Ron Robertson, Theresa Mason, Dennis Hartin, Steve Dominguez, Linda Inlow, Sue Lemly.

POEMS

Tricia Culverhouse, Marguarite Terrell

MUSIC

Music was arranged by Hunt Beyer who also composed the "Mourning Song."

MASK MAKERS

Jim Carroll, Sharon Hunefeld, Rita Brock, Sue Lemley, Ron Robertson, John Linscheid, Karen Campbell, Louis de Grazia, Peter St. Martin, Becky Beyer, Chris Allen, Theresa Mason, Lisa Devitt, Steve Fox, Marguerite Terrill.

PUPPET MAKERS

Theresa Mason, Sue Ruffner, David Drake, 'Ofa Mone, Bente Ericksen, Tone Ericksen, Oyvind Eriksen, Frances Tokahuta, John Tokahuta, Sawan Tokahuta, Jeff Inlow, Linda Inlow, Pat Riddell, Yoshie Kawakita.

COSTUME DESIGN

Sharon Hunefeld, Mary Margaret Bever, Bonnie Bollwinkel, Hilda Castuera, Rita Brock, Becky Beyer.

PROPS

Dennis Hartin, David Drake, Dan Campbell, Josephine Sayre, Les Sayre.

SET

Lon Rycroft, Ron Robertson, Alan Luddington, Karen Campbell, David Drake, Peter St. Martin, Yoshie Kawakita, Sue Lemly, Pat Riddell.

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The narrator (played by Nerida Drake) wore a half-mask to enable her to speak easier.

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ESTHER

A Communally Created Experimental Theatre Piece

(While the audience is gathering, Bruce and Brad play Jazz.)

ACT I

Setting: King's Banquet room on stage--purple curtain. The Palace Gate is stage left.

(Music stops. Black out. NARRATOR walks down the center aisle of the sanctuary. Spotlight follows her down aisle and holds on her. On stage crowd (CHORUS members) gathers slowly minimg a party with much eating, and drinking of wine. MORDECAI and ESTHER sit at the Palace gate.)

NARRATOR: In the days of King Aha, who reigned from India to Ethiopia, over 127 provinces, in those days when the king sat on his royal throne in Susa, the capital city, the King gave a feast for all his princes and courtiers and all the army officers of Persia and Media. And none sought to please the King more than did Haman, the Agagite.

(At "127 provinces" the stage lights start to come us. By end of her speech they are up full.)

HAMAN: A parade!! Let us have a parade to honor our KING!!!

CHORUS: (All yell) Let's have a parade! (Cheers and yelling)

NARRATOR: And, yes, a parade was had to honor King Aha, who, it was said, owned everything worth owning.

(As NARRATOR continues, the next part CHORUS members parade out signs symbolizing each possession.)

Homage was paid to the King's Bank America Card. (A giant Bank Americard Card carried out)
Homage was paid to the King's Oil Wells. (A giant Shell sign carried out)
Homage was paid to the King's Magic Box. (An N.B.C. sign carried out)
Homage was paid to the King's Chocolate Bars. (A Nestle sign carried out.)
Homage was paid to the King's Carriages. (A G.M. sign carried out)
And homage was paid to the King's greatest possession: the pride of his harem, VASHTI....his Queen.

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(CHORUS cheers and whistles. VASHTI seems disinterested, but they motion to make her parade before them.)

(HAMAN blows his whistle, twirls his baton. The BAND begins the Sousa March, "Stars and Stripes Forever." HAMAN, as Drum Major, leads the BAND and CHORUS down the center aisle of the audience and EXITS for the First Parade. Houselights go up half at beginning of the parade as they exit. MORDECAI, ESTHER remain at the Palace Gate. A MESSENGER remains on stage.)

NARRATOR: But Mordecai, the Jew, who guarded the King's gate, and Mordecai's neice, Esther, came to be aware of a plot on the King's life.

(Two lights go up on Puppet Stage, stage right. Two puppets emerge. In the background, a crowd of Freedom Fighters shouts excitedly.)

NARRATOR

(Poem by Tricia Culverhouse)

The king must surely die!
was the solemn cry of people
Rising up to throw off
the shackles of injustice
holding them in his cruel
and imprisioning rule.

BIGTHANA and TERESH: (small hand puppets) Kill the King! Kill the King! Kill the King!

(The CROWD in the background join their excited yelling)

(MORDECAI moves nearer to the Freedom Fighters and listens while they are shouting. Then a messenger walks by and he sends her to the King. She runs down center aisle where the parade has just exited.)

NARRATOR (continuing the poem)

Bigthana and Teresh
were pledged to carry out
And fulfill their desire.
They would have surely done so
Had not this Mordecai
The Jew, discovered them
And used their deadly plot
For reasons of his own.
For Mordecai knew well
To save the kind would bring
To him some great reward.

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(The BAND and CHORUS parade re-enters, playing/marching to the Sousa March, up the aisle, stage right. After they march up to the front, the messenger enters running after them. She comes running up to the King in front of the puppet stage.)

MESSENGER: Your Highness, there's been an attempt on your life, an attempt on your life, and Mordecai discovered it!!

KING: A HA!!

HAMAN: They should be hanged!

KING: They should be hanged! Hang them!

(Lights go out on the puppet stage as the small puppets are ripped from their stage and hung on the gallows--while the CHORUS says, "Hang them!" "Thus it shall be done to all the King's enemies." "They should be hanged.")

(While this is going on the musicians make strange and cacophonous instrumental sounds and noise. The second parade exits raucously down the center aisle again. --In fact, once the hanging begins, they go off. The parade really never stops.)

(Of the Party, only VASHTI remains. (MORDECAI and ESTHER are also on stage right by the gate. VASHTI stands looking at the hanged ones. A bell tolls. She sings: "Lord Have Mercy.")

NARRATOR: On the 7th day, during the parade, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded a messenger to bring Queen Vashti before him with the royal crown, in order to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to behold.

(A messenger returns down the center aisle from the King to Vashti.)

MESSENGER: Queen Vashti, the King requests the pleasure of your presence. He wants to show off your body to all.

VASHTI

(Poem by Marguerite Terrell)

I will not parade before a group of drunken men,
I'd consider it a sin.
So tell the King that I refuse to come.

MESSENGER: But you can't refuse. He'll kill me if I tell him. You must come.

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VASHTI: (continuing poem by Marguerite)

It is a thing of great beauty,
That you have performed your duty.
But let it be crystal clear,
I will not appear.

(Vashti looks at messenger silently, then turns away.)

(MESSENGER runs out center aisle. VASHTI exits stage right as parade enters the aisle stage right from the back. They continue raucous "Hang those enemies." "Thus it shall be done," etc. The Instrumentalists continue cacophonous sounds.)

(MESSENGER runs in after they are almost up to the front and whispers in the King's ear. Parade lights--house lights go out. Stage lights come up.)

KING: Vashti REFUSED?!!! She refused to come when I called?!!!

CHORUS: (Each member of the chorus takes a different line. In turn, they repeat them again and again, escalating in speed and volume. After about 3-1/2 times, HAMAN blows his whistle.)

Vashti refused.
She refused.
What does this mean for all of our wives?
She must be banished.
What does this mean for the Queendom?
This has social implications.

(MORDECAI and ESTHER enter, stage left and sit in front of the gate.)

HAMAN: (Whistles. Chorus is silent.) Lord, King: This will not do. Vashti is an example to all women in the Kingdom. Why, if she refused to come, when you call, what will happen when all the husbands call their wives and they refuse to come. Vashti must be banished. We need a new queen. She will be BANISHED!

KING: Aha.

HAMAN: She will be banished.

(The KING nods)

MESSENGER: (Appears with a megaphone and reads:) Vashti is forever banished from the Queendom. This has created a vacancy. These are the qualifications: Total subservience to the King. No previous experience is necessary. In fact, no previous experience allowed. All beautiful virgins are encouraged to apply.

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(MESSENGER leads the Third Parade to "Big Spender." The CHORUS follows her out the Center aisle saying, "All beautiful virgins are encouraged to apply, calling all virgins," etc. King remains on stage.)
(As they exit, Mordecai pushes Esther towards the Beauty Contest (Puppet Stage). A eunuch, Hegai, hands her a mask and she disappears behind the puppet stage.)

(The parade enters aisle back down towards stage right, the band still playing "Big Spender." Each Chorus member carries a cardboard swimsuit beauty contestant puppet. Lights go up on the puppet stage. The KING watches each cardboard beauty contestant as each one parades across the puppet stage and exits. After each of these two-dimensional beauty queen puppets have paraded across, a three-dimensional Esther puppet, the same size, wearing a swimming suit and a sash saying, "Miss Esther," appears on stage. She wears a mask which is a miniature replica of the one the eunuch handed ESTHER before the contest. She walks across the stage making the appropriate beauty contestant turns and exits.)

HAMAN: I've just been informed that all entries are in. Has the judge made a decision?

KING: Aha.

HAMAN: May I have the envelope, please?

(KING AHA hands him the envelope. HAMAN tears it open.)

HAMAN: THE WINNER IS....(drum roll. He takes paper out of the envelope and reads it)....ESTHER!

CHORUS: (Cheer and whistle)

(ESTHER comes out from behind the puppet stage wearing the same blue dress she had worn earlier, but now, instead of her bare face, she is wearing the mask Hegai gave her. She enters regally and triumphantly. As the CHORUS watches in delight from stage right, ESTHER and KING AHA move stage left to "The Wedding March," and exit. CHORUS cheers. Black out.)

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Interlude

Music: Brad and Bruce play a Jazz interlude.

ACT II

Scene 1

Setting: Yellow curtain is pulled, depicting outer court.

Lights: At the end of the music, the stage lights come up full.

(Spotlight on NARRATOR. CHORUS on stage with Crowd Puppets.)

NARRATOR: Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, was an ambitious man.

(As this is read, a small (two-foot tall) puppet Haman crosses from stage left to stage right. The small (two-foot) Crowd puppets bow and the Chorus cheers.)

NARRATOR: And Haman favored King Aha with numerous flatteries and tales of his exploits and Haman's power struck fear into the hearts of the subjects of the realm.

(A larger (three-foot) Haman puppet crosses stage left to stage right, same as above. Both the smallest Crowd puppets and the three-foot tall Crowd puppets bow and the Chorus cheers.)

NARRATOR: So King Aha promoted Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite of Macedonia, advancing him and giving him precedence above all people and all the king's servants, and above all his fellow-officers, for so the king commanded.

(As this is read, a human-sized HAMAN crosses stage from left to right. All the puppets and chorus cheer and bow half-way down, from waist.)

NARRATOR: And as Haman grew in stature in the eyes of the King, he grew in his own eyes as well.

(A larger than life HAMAN on stilts in a giant mask, crosses from left to right, waves both arms triumphantly to the audience. All the puppets and chorus bow prostrate while the narrator continues.)

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NARRATOR: But Mordecai, who was in attendance at the court, did not bow down to him or do obeisance. (Spot out)

(HAMAN stops and gestures to Mordecai that Mordecai should bow, but MORDECAI turns his back. MORDECAI walks off stage left with his back to HAMAN. HAMAN becomes infuriated. Then he stalks off, stage right.)

Scene 2

Setting: Yellow curtain is pulled to reveal purple backdrop, depicting the inside palace.

Lights: Spot on Narrator. Lights on stage.

(King Aha is at center stage. He is fiddling with his scepter. A member of the chorus, Hegai is in attendance upon him. Other chorus members attend him as well.)

NARRATOR: Haman, Lord High Officer and Chief over the officers at the Court of His Royal Majesty, Ruler of Persia, and all principalities under its sway--this Haman the Son of Hammeadatha the Agagite was in a great rage because Mordecai refused to do him homage as Haman expected. He put Mordecai under surveillance. On learning that Mordecai was a Jew, Haman's wrath increased and he scorned to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole Kingdom of King Aha, Mordecai and all his race. (Spot out)

(Hegai, a eunuch, bows low before the king and announces Haman)

HEGAI: Haman, Chief of Chiefs, to see his most excellent majesty, ruler of the royal realm of Persia together with all subject nations, peoples, and principalities. Here's Haman! (Drawn out)

(HAMAN, a giant on stilts, enters swiftly as the court bows to him. He walks quickly to the King, who extends his scepter as Haman makes a curt bow and touches the scepter.)

HAMAN: Lord King.

KING: Aha!

(The chorus returns to their duties)

HAMAN: I must speak to you on a matter of utmost importance.

KING: What is it, Haman?

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HAMAN: I have discovered, insidiously permeating His Majesty's realm and dispersed among the many peoples of all the provinces and principalities of His Majesty's Kingdom, a certain people who keep themselves apart. They eat strange foods and wear strange clothes. Furthermore, the insult your loyal subjects by refusing to mix into the society as do other races and peoples. Their customs clash with those of loyal inhabitants and patriotic Persians in such a way as to cause much grumbling among their neighbors. More serious, however, is the fact that they have their own laws. These laws are different from all normal laws; and they do not keep His Majesty's laws. They are a subversive element with the nation. It does not befit Your Majesty to tolerate them.

KING: What shall we do?

HAMAN: My proposal is that in order to avert calamity and to insure justice and order in the realm, let a decree be made in writing for their destruction.

KING: Need we be so brutal?

HAMAN: And furthermore, I will personally, in humble gratitude for our nation's deliverance, pay ten thousand talents of silver into the King's treasury.

KING: Do with them as you wish.

HAMAN: I have written an edict. And if I am granted the power of the King's card, I will make sure this law is carried out, expediciously and efficiently throughout the realm. For everyone knows an edict sealed by the King's royal card can not be revoked.

(The KING quickly hands Haman the card. HAMAN takes a large piece of paper, writes up a large decree which he seals with the King's card. He then feeds the edict into one side of the King's throne and punches a button. While he does this, the NARRATOR reads: (Spotlight on Narrator)

NARRATOR: A decree sealed with the King's card to guarantee that it could not be revoked, was sent throughout the empire to the king's satraps, the governors of the provinces, and to all principalities, commanding the killing of the Jews.

(MESSENGER comes out, unfurls the scroll and reads, as the spot slowly sweeps across the stage)

MESSENGER: King Aha, the great King of the governors of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia, and the subordinate officials:

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"Ruler as I am over many nations and Master of all the world, it is my will--not in the arrogance of power but because my rule is mild and equitable--to ensure to my subjects a life permanently free from disturbance."

"Insofar as Haman, the wise and wonderful Agagite, has presented to us that scattered among all the races of the empire is a disaffected people, opposed in its laws to every nation and continually ignoring the Royal Ordinances, so that our irreproachable plans for the unified administration of the Empire cannot be made effective."

"We therefore order that those hereby designated to you shall all be utterly destroyed by the sword of their enemies, without mercy or pity on the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month of the present year."

(HAMAN turns and blows his whistle, whereon the CHORUS re-enters on stick horses. As "The Lone Ranger" plays, they speed past the throne, saluting Haman and the King. As they pass by the King, they pick up copies of the edict from another slot on the side of the throne. They gallop to places all over the sanctuary--balcony, sides, front, etc. Each line is ready by a different member from a different part of the sanctuary. The SPOT sweeps slowly)

(First Decree of King Aha)

KATIE: An order of His Majesty!
BRUCE: To destroy!
SHARON: Destroy!
MARK: Destroy!
LISA: Destroy!

BRUCE: To annihilate!
SHARON: Annihilate!
MARK: Annihilate!
LISA: Annihilate!

BRUCE: All Jews

SHARON: Young and Old,

LISA: Men, Women and Children!

MARK: And plunder, rob, and rip off their possessions.

NARRATOR: Thus letters were sent by courier to all the peoples, so that they might be ready to attack the Jews on the appointed day. And the decree was issued in Susa, the capital city. (Spot on Narrator during narration and then out)

(COURIERS gallop back up the aisles to the music "The Lone Ranger," as VASHTI enters from stage right--spot following her and MORDECAI from stage left. One COURIER gallops past Vashti and hands her a decree as they pass. Another COURIER gallops

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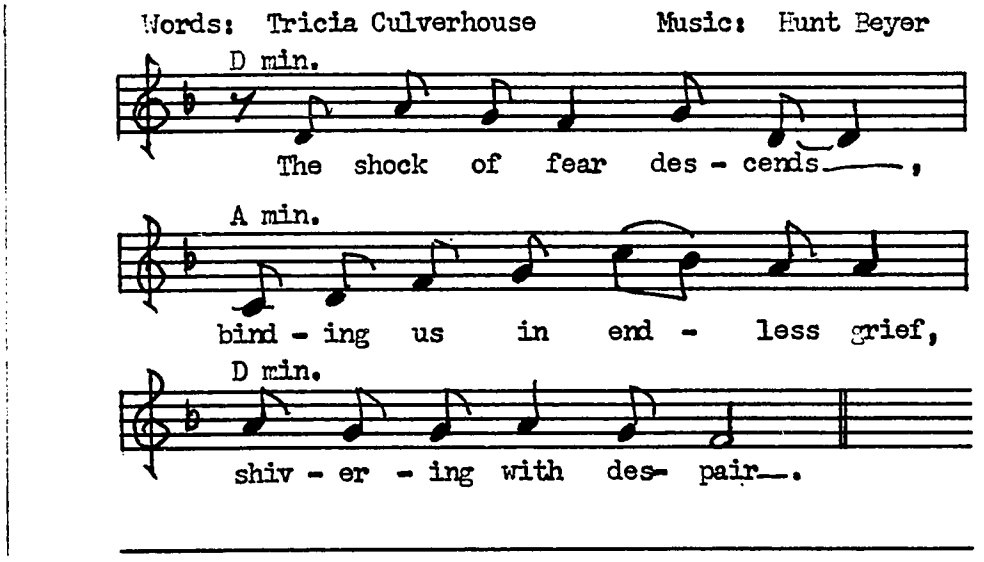
past Mordecai, handing him a decree. They read in stunned silence. MORDECAI strips off his robe and puts on sackcloth. He takes a sign which says "Ashes" and hangs it on his forehead. While he is doing these actions, VASHTI begins singing "Mourning Song" and slowly walks down the center aisle. The CHORUS joins in singing the song and follows her out.)

(MORDECAI exits and the lights fade out)

"Mourning Song"



Scene 3

Music: Mozart Trio

Setting: Purple Curtain, Inner Palace

Lights: On full stage

(On stage, ESTHER is attended by Hathach, a eunuch. As stately music is played, she files her nails. The CHORUS chants their lines from behind the stage.)

(MORDECAI enters from stage left in sackcloth and ashes and begins to slowly walk to his gate.)

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(While the Narrator reads, HATHACH enters as Mordecai reaches the gate. He hurries to Esther where he gestures in the direction of the gate. A spot shines on the Narrator throughout this scene.)

NARRATOR: Now, Queen Esther was attended by a Eunuch, Hathach, and Hathach brought word that Mordecai was at the gate wearing sackcloth and covered with ashes. And Esther was distraught and sent garments for Mordecai so they might take off the sackcloth and clothe him with the fine clothes.

(HATHACH takes the clothes to Mordecai. MORDECAI rejects them. HATHACH returns to Esther.)

NARRATOR: So, then Esther ordered Hathach to find out from Mordecai what the trouble was and what it meant.

(Each time HATHACH moves across the stage, the movement becomes slower. This time HATHACH goes to Mordecai, delivers the message and receives a message from Mordecai for Esther.)

NARRATOR: Hathach went to Mordecai in the city square in front of the palace gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him and how much money Haman had offered to pay into the Royal Treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the decree so that he might show it to Esther and tell her about it, bidding her to go to the King to plead for his favor and entreat him for her people.

(HATHACH returns even more slowly to Esther.)

NARRATOR: Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

ESTHER: Do not bother me with the King's edicts, for they are no concern of mine.

All the king's couriers and the people of the provinces are aware that if a person, man or woman, enters the King's presence in the inner court unbidden, there is only one law: that person shall be put to death, unless the King stretches out to her the scepter; then only can one live. And it has been thirty days since I myself was called to go to the king.

(HATHACH returns to Mordecai to deliver the message.)

NARRATOR: But when Hathach told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai bade him return to her with a message:

MORDECAI: Do not imagine that you alone of all the Jews will escape because you are in the Royal Palace. There are those who will reveal your true identity. If you remain silent at such a time as this, relief and deliverance for the Jews will come from another quarter, but you and your family will perish.

CHORUS: Perish, perish, perish, etc. (from off stage.)

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(HATHACH returns to Esther and then back to Mordecai as the Narrator speaks.)

NARRATOR: Then Esther, the Queen, sent an answer and asked Mordecai to assemble all the Jews in Susa to fast for her. And she and her maidens also fasted three days in preparation. (Spot out)

(Long pause)

ESTHER: I will go into the presence of the King, although it is against the law....and if I perish,....I perish. (Black out. All characters exit.) ("Mourning Song" Instrumental)

Scene 4

Setting: Purple curtain backdrop--King's Palace

(KING at center stage is holding scepter and napping) (Spot on Narrator)

NARRATOR: And on the third day Esther brought her fast to an end. She took off the clothes of mourning and put on all her splendour; and, although she was not bidden, she went in to the King.

(ESTHER enters from the center aisle back of the sanctuary. The spotlight follows her as she slowly and apprehensively walks from the rear carrying a fan. A drum beats a slow, BOOM....BOOM ....BOOM....to each step. When she almost reaches the King, she nervously drops her fan; the noise rouses the King, who looks up in surprise. To the snare drums she runs to him and falls at his feet. He slowly extends the scepter.)

ESTHER: Spare me! Spare me!

KING: Why, Esther, my Queen, do not worry, you will be spared. The decree of death is only for common people. Do not worry. I will give you whatever you wish. What is your desire--my chocolate bars, my carriages, perhaps my oil wells?!! I may even give you half my Bank America Card! Whatever you wish, I will give it to you--up to half my kingdom.

ESTHER: I have but a small request. If it please your majesty, I would like you and Haman to dine with me at a special banquet I have prepared for the both of you.

KING: Let Haman be summoned that we may do as Esther wishes.

(HAMAN enters, bows and follows the royal pair off stage right as if to the banquet. All lights out.)

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Scene 5

Setting: Small Puppet Stage--Haman's and his wife, Zeresh's house.

(Spot on Narrator and lights on puppet stage)

NARRATOR: And the King and Haman went to the banquet which Esther had prepared. And Haman's pride knew no bounds for he alone of all the satraps, governors, princes, and officers attendant upon the King had been invited to the banquet of Queen Esther.

(The Haman puppet enters puppet stage and gestures to the Zeresh puppet.)

HAMAN: Queen Esther only asked myself to accompany the King to an opulent feast. That is not all, she has also said, "If I have pleased the King, let the King and Haman come again to a Royal feast." Yet, all these honours mean nothing to me as long as I must endure the isolence of that Jew, Mordecai.

ZERESH: You are the King's most important servant. Except for Aha, himself, you are the most powerful man on earth. It is not right that you should be treated so disgracefully by a common Jew. Let a gallows seventy-five feet high be set up; and you recommend to the King in the morning to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then you can go with the king to the banquet in good spirits.

NARRATOR: So Haman ordered a gallows erected--seventy-five feet high. And his rage subsided while he anticipated the destruction of Mordecai.

(The gallows are adjusted to go up higher.)

(The puppets exit from the puppet stage. Blackout.)

Scene 6

(Stage lights come on to reveal the KING at center stage with a pillow behind his head, and a quilt tucked around him. He is restless. There is a small bell on a little table next to his throne. CHORUS stands off to one side looking on.)

CHORUS: (In syncopated rhythm) Tension, restlessness, tension, restlessness (keep repeating, starting out as a large whisper and becoming much more hushed as the NARRATOR begins to read. CHORUS SLOWLY FADES OUT THE SPEAKING.)

(Spot on Narrator)

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NARRATOR: On that night the King was unable to sleep. So, late in the night he ordered the Lord High Chronicler Supreme Most Storyteller to tell him a story.

(KING AHA rings a bell and the Lord High Chronicler Supreme Most Storyteller enters and pulls the chair up beside the King. Spot goes on KING and STORYTELLER.)

STORYTELLER: You rang, Your Most Royal Highness, Prince of the Realm?

KING: Yes, Lord High Chronicler Supreme most Storyteller.

STORYTELLER: That is me!

KING: Tell me a story, for I cannot sleep.

STORYTELLER: What story would Your Royal Majesty, Prince of the Realm, like for me to tell you now?

KING: Uhhhhhhm. Just choose one.

STORYTELLER: Good decision! Would you like to hear the one about the Three Little Piggies? No, I told you that one last night. Well, let's see! Tonight I'll tell you the story about the Frog King.

(Story composed by Richard Hunt)

STORYTELLER: "Once upon a time, there lived a very unusual king. Unlike other kings, he was neither handsome, nor intelligent, nor courageous. This guy was a real, genuine, honest-to-goodness loser! He was slimy, disgusting, green with envy, for, you see, he was a frog king--a little joke there!"

KING: Aha!

STORYTELLER: "He had warts all over his body. A psychologist informed him he had all the personality of a pet rock, the charisma of a dead fish! This guy was really bad news! To tell you the truth, in all the kingdom, there just wasn't any other job he was qualified to do. For, you know it and I know it, it doesn't take much intelligence to sit on a throne all day rubber-stamping actions of one's subordinates. (KING grows restless) To make a long story short, this guy was really dumb!"

CHORUS: How dumb was he?

STORYTELLER: "Well, let me tell you! He was so dumb that when he couldn't sleep he had the audicity to call in the Supreme High Most Storyteller to tell him a beddy...."

(After CHORUS a slow look of recognition begins to cross the King's face.) (KING fidgets, coughs loudly.)

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STORYTELLER: O, I'm sorry, Your Majesty, I guess that must have been the wrong story, after all. I'll tell you one this time I just know you'll like.

"Once upon a time there lived a very handsome and courageous king." (To audience:) I bet he thinks this one is about himself!) (Back to King) "Once upon a time, there lived a very handsome king who was very courageous. And this king was much beloved throughout the whole country. (STORYTELLER jumps up.) He was their king and they were his people." (He sits down)

"Even though he was much beloved, nevertheless, there was, in the palace, court intrigue. Yeah, there was evil lurking in the shadows."

As the story continues, "it seems there were two sinister, diabolical, evil eunuchs, who were planning to kill the king. And it seems their reason for doing it was--they just didn't like the king, and their other reason was--being eunuchs, they just had a lot of free time. So they were determined to kill! Murder! Maim! Destroy! Hurt the king!" (To the King) And do you know what happened? (KING shakes head "no.") Well, of course you don't, I mean, King Ah....

"On that very day, Mordecai discovered the plot, warned the king and saved the king's life, faithful servant that he was!"

KING: Is that a true story?

STORYTELLER: It is about your very self, Your Royal Majesty, Prince of the Realm.

KING: And this Mordecai saved my life?

STORYTELLER: He did.

KING: What has become of this man? Was he ever rewarded in any way?

STORYTELLER: I'm not sure.

KING: Does it say so in the Chronicles?

STORYTELLER: Let me see....here....No, not on page 42--a pretty picture. No! I'm sorry to tell you, nothing was ever done.

KING: This is terrible. Something must be done! This man must be rewarded! Where are my satraps? Where are my eunuchs? Is there no one in authority who can do something!??

CHORUS: Here comes Haman. Here comes Haman; here comes Haman! (Continues as Storyteller says next line.)

STORYTELLER: Haman has just entered the court, Your Royal Majesty!
KING: Send him in.

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STORYTELLER: Your wish is my command.

(The Lord High Chronicler Storyteller bows to the King and Haman (giant size). He gestures in the King's direction and HAMAN approaches the King as the Storyteller exits.) (HAMAN bows.)

HAMAN: Lord King, as you beckon, I come!

KING: Yes, Haman, tell me what should be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?

HAMAN: (Turns to audience) A man whom the King wishes to honor? Who could that be, but me! (Turns back to King) For the man whom the King wishes to honor, let there be brought royal robes from which the King himself wears, and put a medal of bravery around his neck; bring a ring of high rank to be put on his finger, and let a crown be put upon his head; and a horse be brought which the King has ridden. Put one of the King's most loyal and exalted officers in charge to see that the man whom the King wishes to honour is led through the streets for all to see. And, let the officer who leads the horse cry out as he goes, "See what is done for the man whom the king wishes to honor!"

CHORUS: (During the end of Haman's speech, whisper, and then raise pitch after he finishes.) Yes, yes, yes, yes....

KING: Aha, AHA! Yes! So shall it be done to the man whom the King wishes to honor! Take these instructions and follow them to the letter. See that all this is done for the man to whom the King owes his life; the man whom the king wishes to honor, Mordecai the Jew.

(HAMAN is crushed and sinks down. Haman takes leave of the King and goes to the step of stage left, as King Aha exits stage right. Blackout.)

Scene 7

Setting: Yellow curtain depicting Outer Court.

(Stage lights go up. MORDECAI enters from stage left, dressed in a purple cape wearing a medal around his neck. He goes to center stage.)

(CHORUS parades in after him to a drum roll and instrumental fanfare. Circles around Mordecai, playing Kazoos and other party blowers. Then, after they are behind him, they all shout, "Hail! Mordecai!" and they prostrate themselves before him. HAMAN emerges human size again with folded arms. A drum roll starts, as if to begin another parade. The spot does a figure eight and then a quick blackout.)

Scene 8

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Setting: Small Puppet Stage--Haman's and Zeresh's House.

(The spot is on the NARRATOR and the lights are on the puppet stage.)

NARRATOR: Then Mordecai returned to the King's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning with his head covered. (Spot out.)

HAMAN: (Puffing and groaning) How long must I endure that Jew, Mordecai, and his insolence? Oooohhhhh. (Groaning.)

ZERESH: He has not been hanged yet upon the gallows?

HAMAN: Hanged! Not only has he not been hanged, but the King has taken Mordecai into his favor.

ZERESH: O, no!

HAMAN: And now all the people are bowing to him.

ZERESH: Oh, no! I can't believe it!

HAMAN: And I had to lead it! (Groan)

ZERESH: If this Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is one of the Jewish people, you are powerless against him. (Sadly) You have fallen once. You shall fall again.

(Blackout)

ACT III

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Scene 1

Setting: Purple curtain, inside of King's Palace.

Music: "Scheherezade."

Lights: (House lights come up on scene with Esther luxuriously dropping grapes into the King's mouth, in pantomime to the music.)

CHORUS: (In unison) Esther, Esther! Ask him! Ask the King to save us, Esther! Save your people! Esther, ask him. Ask him, Esther....Save us!

(During this badgering, Esther turns and attempts to quiet the Chorus' badgering. The King notices a change in her attitude.)

KING: You seem troubled, my dear, what is it? Do not fear to make a request, for as I said, I will give you anything--up to half my Kingdom, my carriages, my palaces, even my stock in the media: whatever you wish--I will grant it.

ESTHER: If it please you majesty, I ask that my own life and the lives of my people be spared. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, slain! and exterminated! If it had been a matter of selling us, men, women and children, into slavery, I should have kept silence; because it might have damaged the interest of the King, (with hand over heart) but we have been sold to be destroyed.

KING: Who has presumed to do such a thing as this?

(The CHORUS watches, fearful, shivering, huddled together, following the action.)

ESTHER: A foe and an enemy.

KING: An enemy? A foe? Who?

ESTHER: He, he....he is....

(As scene builds, Haman gets more and more nervous and fidgity.)

KING: Who is this vile murderer?

ESTHER: He is....He is....

KING: Who? Who?

ESTHER: This wicked Haman. (She falls onto couch in exhaustion.)

(KING blows up! Percussion, cacophonous instrumental and other

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noise. He goes in circles as lights blink on and off. The CHORUS covers their faces. Haman is in fear before the King. KING exits stage right. CHORUS exits stage left.)

(HAMAN goes to Esther on the couch.)

HAMAN: Esther, I had no idea. I didn't know you were a Jew. But, of course, the law does not apply to you; you're part of the royal family. You're not like them. Esther, don't you know my life is in your hands. (He gets closer still, leaning over.) Esther! Esther! Save me! (By now, he is on the couch with Esther, bent over imploring her to save him.)

(The KING re-enters stage right and CHORUS stage left. KING spots Haman on the couch with Esther.)

KING: Will he even assault the queen in my presence!?! What should be done to such a vile man?

(HARBONA enters.)

HARBONA: Aha, King Aha! At Haman's house stands the gallows, seventy-five feet tall, which Haman has prepared to kill Mordecai on; you know Mordecai, the guy to served the king so well....

KING: Aha! (Remembering)

HARBONA: Why don't you hang him?

KING: Aha!

CHORUS: Hang him. Hey man, it's Haman! Hangman hang Haman! Hey, man, hangman Hang him: Haman! (Catcalls with this, and then fade back.)

KING: (In an authoritative manner.) Hang him, Hathach. Drag Haman away to be hung.

Scene 2

(HATHACH and Hegai drag Haman over to the gallows and he's hung. Spot on the gallows. CHORUS, KING, ESTHER and MORDECAI - from gate - look on.)

(The Bell Tolls.)

(VASHTI emerges from stage right with spot following. She sings mourningfully, "Lord Have Mercy" as she slowly moves cross the stage. She stops in front of the hanging figure and is silent. She resumes her mournful song and slow exit. Spot out.)

Scene 3

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Music:

(KING AHA and ESTHER move to the center. ESTHER gazes at herself in a hand mirror. They act like "all's well with the world." ESTHER, beside King Aha, catches a glimpse of Mordecai in the mirror, with rock around his neck. She begins weeping.)

KING: What is troubling you, now, my dear Queen of Susa?

ESTHER: If it please your Majesty, I fear that I and my people are still in danger. If there be any kindness in your heart, could you please revoke that awful decree sent out by Haman some time ago?

KING: Oh, yes, of course! My dear Esther, My quester, whatever you wish. Why, for you I would even revoke the rollers on my coaster. (He twirls the throne.)

MEMUCAN: (The King's Wise One) But, King, that's absolutely impossible! The arms production and employment rates have improved a lot. The plans for the killing have been laid out. You know better than anyone: once a decree is issued, it can not be revoked. No! It can <u>not</u> be revoked!

KING: (In a pouty voice.) Well, phooey! What is to be done? My queen is unhappy and so I am! Is there nothing to be done to right this dreadful state of affairs?

MEMUCAN: I realize the situation appears bleak, King, but with some shrewd political maneuvers, I think we can make your kingdom safe. Simply issue another decree--one which will permit Jews to defend themselves against any attacks.

KING: Aha! I am so brilliant to surround myself with such brilliant people. Esther, fear not, for a decree shall be written for the Jews to defend themselves.

(Kazoo voluntary. ESTHER begins to perk up. All of a sudden, MORDECAI, at his gate, takes off the rock around his neck, wraps a note around it, and throws it inside to Esther. She reads the message, looks over to where Mordecai is obviously eavesdropping. He eagerly nods his head. ESTHER gulps!)

ESTHER: (Imploringly flirtatious) Oh, most brave and handsome King, your power and wisdom excel beyond all other mortals. If there be any kindness in your heart, I implore you to grant my people not only the right to defend themselves, but to retaliate. Please, I beg of you to allow us to show the world that we Jews are not afraid to fight.

KING: Aha, Aha! (As in "yes, I see") Why, of course! Queen of Susa,

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Esther, if I can get a smile on that pretty little face of yours, I don't suppose it will hurt to issue just one more tiny decree. Why don't you write it, dear!

(ESTHER tuns and motions Mordecai inside to come in and write the decree. KING turns over the Bank America Card to Esther, who takes the decree from Mordecai and stamps it with the King's card. ESTHER then puts the decree in the King's throne for duplication.)

Scene 4

(Spot comes up on NARRATOR, left center)

NARRATOR: So as it has been written, "The King's secretaries were summoned at that time (in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the 23rd day) and an edict was written according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and princes of the provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language."

(Spot out.)

(During the reading, MORDECAI goes through an exchange of clothes by putting on Haman's jacket, and taking his whistle and baton.)

(To William Tell's, "The Lone Ranger," couriers on stick horses quickly pick up decree copies and scatter out to all the corners of the sanctuary and balcony. Spot makes a slow sweep. Then they shout the decree:)

(Second Decree of King Aha)

KATIE: By order of his Royal Highness, the Corporate Wizard, King Aha--
SHARON: To assure the tranquility and peace of all the realm,
BRUCE: Jews in every city may gather and defend their lives.
LISA: Not only that
MARK: But for Jews to avenge themselves, that is....
BRUCE: To destroy!
SHARON: Destroy!
MARK: Destroy!
LISA: Destory!
BRUCE: Slay!
SHARON: Slay!
MARK: Slay!
LISA: Slay!
BRUCE: And to annihilate.
SHARON: Annihilate!
MARK: Annihilate!
LISA: Annihilate!

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TONI: Any people!
LISA: Men, women, and children
MARK: who might attack them or plunder their goods!
TONI: Such behavior is indeed commendable!

(Couriers return to the recorded music: "The Lone Ranger." Lights go up on stage as they return. They gallop around the king in a frenzy. The spot makes a slow sweep, and they gallop off stage.)

(Spot on Narrator)

NARRATOR: On the day the Jews gathered in all the provinces of King Aha to lay hands on their enemies, all the princes of the provinces, the satraps and the governors and royal officials helped the Jews for fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. For Mordecai was great in the King's house and his fame spread throughout all the provinces, for the man, Mordecai, grew more and more powerful.

(MORDECAI rsponds.)

NARRATOR: So the Jews struck down their enemies with the sword, slaughtering them and destroying them and did as they pleased to those who hated them. In Susa the capital, the Jews slayed and destroyed 500 people but laid no hands on the plunder. The Jews reassembled the next day and slew 300 more people in Susa, but laid no hands on the plunder. And the Jews in the King's other provinces slew 75,000 of their enemies, but they took no plunder.)

Scene 5

Setting: Red Tumultuous curtain--with abstract forms of tortured red and black bodies.

Music: Music from "Varese" with heavy percusison, cacophonous and violent sounds which escalate in tempo and volume.

(Two CHORUS members return to the stage with swords, run out and clash them together. They continue to fight with them. Other CHORUS members carry out long red crepe paper streamers and heads hanging from them. One set carries the pole down to the audience, moving it and waving it back and forth. The other couple moves the poles in a figure eight and back and forth. All move faster and faster as the scene builds.)

(As the CHORUS members enact the bloody massacre, ESTHER, MORDECAI and KING and other CHORUS members take cups and scoop up wine, drinking to drunkenness.)

(All join in a spiraling crescendo, building to a violent

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orgy. The red light focuses on ESTHER and MORDECAI.)

(Then the movement becomes slower and slower; the music winds down and the lights go down slowly.)

(VASHTI moves out slowly, followed by the spot. She looks around at the violent scene.)

(The Bell Tolls. VASHTI sings mournfully: "Lord Have Mercy." Silence. Black out.)

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APPENDIX

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APPENDIX A

AN OUTLINE OF SOME OF THE ASPECTS OF THE BREAD AND PUPPET THEATRE WHICH INFLUENCED OUR GOALS IN PUPPET THEATRE

1. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the Bread and Puppet Theatre is an exemplification of the dynamics of the hermeneutical triangle applied to dramatic presentations. Their stories are usually based upon ancient stories and rituals reinterpreted according to their historical context.

2. Bread and Puppet Theatre is a "holy theatre." Peter Schumann, creator-director, feels that the theatre is a holy place--where the invisible can be made holy. Their presentations attempt to address the fundamental human need to seek to bring wholeness to a world cut off from traditional metaphysical roots. Their presentations sing, dance, move and cry that ordinary life is sacred. Peter Schumann says, "the theatre should be as basic as bread....we would like to be able to feed people."[1] So in each performance, as they touch the mysteries of everyday life, they break and share home-ground and home-baked bread, coated with smelly garlic, with everyone.

3. Bread and Puppets is a poverty theatre in style, operating principles, themes and messages. Stylistically, they create simple stories, characters, gestures, and meanings which lend to depth of meaning and promote comprehension of their ideas. The company members' life-style and form of operation reflect their ideals of plain living.

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[1]Peter Schumann as quoted in "Bread and Puppets," Tulane Drama Review, by Stefan Brecht, Vol. T47, 1979, New York Univ., N.Y., p. 35.

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They reject commercial, glossy theatre. Instead, they use recycled materials and construct their own technical and other materials; and their finished creations are rough. Their themes and message promote the value of voluntary poverty.

4. Ritual is used as a basic form to paint stories on elemental themes of existence. They employ huge puppets, sequences, masks, gesture, processions, lessons, etc., to give power to their expression. Many of their pieces are based upon the structure of the Mass, Stations of the Cross, and other ancient or newly-created rituals. The ritual of bread and garlic shared in each event is one example of their use of ritual to make religion immediate to plain folks. As Peter Schumann describes puppet theatre:

> ....Imaging a cathedral, not as a decorated religious place but as a theatre with Christ and the saints and gargoyles being set in motion by puppeteers, talking to the worshippers participating in the ritual of music and words.[2]

5. Their presentations are shaped by the artistic forms which dramatize their pieces. Stories and plots grow in an evolutionary process through the dynamics of making masks, making puppets and playing with various art forms. (The first step in creation of a piece after Peter Schumann thinks of it in his head, is building masks.) The element of space develops the shape of some of the theatrical creations and affects the size and shape of each performance.[3]

6. The company makes symbolic use of artistic forms to give expressions of depth and power. Giant and miniature puppets, masks,

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Madeleine M. Kunin, "The Bread and Puppet Theater," Vermont Life, (Volume XXXI, Number 3, Spring 1977), p. 26.

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dance, sound, props, music, gesture, etc., express communication which is beyond words. Then with new form and power, the word returns as Word to puncture the space with its own symbolic power. These artistic elements create a world for us to enter and to encounter the messages with simplicity and expressive power. They present a common, familiar world with symbols such as bread or the flags from used car lots, but it is also a mysterious world which makes real that which is invisible and that which we know only in the depths of our Being.

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APPENDIX B

POVERTY THEATRE

In addition to the Holy Theatre style, we chose to interpret in a poverty theatre style. A poverty theatre affirms that process is as important as the end product. A poor theatre values simplicity--of means and expression, simple lifestyle, simple and recycled materials. The finished product does not have a commercial glitter to it; it may appear ragged and unpolished. Poverty theatre is non-profit oriented, created for non-commodity production. It is a theatre which acts in identification with the poor--those who can not afford to attend commercial theatre.

In our interdisciplinary hermeneutics, the process was as important to us as the end product. It was in the process where we came alive, that we laughed with each other, bubbled out ideas, pondered over issues and agonized over the text and its relation to us. Our finished theatrical production was important, too--as a way of sharing all that had happened to us through the process of exploring and interpreting Esther.

As we created the play through the various artistic forms, we sought to use simple means. We used recycled and homemade items as much as possible. We used donated sheets to make curtains for the set and costumes. We used lumber that had been thrown out, recycled newspapers, styrofoam from garbage cans, and all kinds of objects which had been tossed away, and gave new life to them. We mixed our own clay out of

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powered mix and water.

In some areas we excelled in simplicity; other areas we failed and became much too complicated. The whole project grew larger than it should have and had too much in it.

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